

# “Be Faithful Today”

## Romans 3:19-28

I have enjoyed teaching over at St. James these past couple of months. I have really had to pay attention to the lesson plans, because lessons 23 through 26 cover Martin Luther and the Reformation. I needed to make sure that those would be our lessons this week and next, with lesson 27 being “All Saints” – which needs to be what we talk about on November 1 – All Saints’ Day.

The first couple of “Reformation” lessons covered Old Testament “Heroes of the Faith” like Samuel and David. I chose to go with different Old Testament “heroes.” We started with Hezekiah. His father, King Ahaz, built high places to make offerings to other gods [2 Chr. 28:25]. The temple in Jerusalem was not used and fell into disrepair. He was very unfaithful.

His son, Hezekiah, as soon as he becomes king, in the first year, repairs the temple, restores the Levites (the priests) and instructs them to consecrate themselves according to the covenant. He restores temple worship and once again there are blood sacrifices for the forgiveness of sins. There is a reformation.

The first year they restored Passover, they poured out the blood of 2000 bulls and 17,000 sheep, and the kids in my 7<sup>th</sup> grade class said, “Ew!” That’s a lot of blood. But, as we read in our Sunday morning Bible class last week in Hebrews 9: “Under the Law almost everything is purified with blood; without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.”

So one of the students asked, “If I want forgiveness, do I have to get cut?” And I said, “No! Jesus got cut for you. He shed His blood for

you.” The Law says, “You are guilty. You deserve more than just to get cut. You deserve death and hell.” Jesus stands between you and the Law. He shed His blood to satisfy the Law, so that you don’t have to – which is a good thing because you can’t. Like everyone else, as St. Paul says, you “have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. You are justified by His grace as a gift.”

Which brings us to the next of our Old Testament “heroes”: And I am using “hero” in the broadest of terms. Hezekiah had a son named Manasseh. He was 12 years old when he became king. Rule of thumb – never put a 12 year old in charge of a country – even though he wouldn’t get full authority until the age of 20. He ruled for 55 years. He was the most evil king that ever ruled in Jerusalem. He rebuilt the altars to Baal. He burned some of his own children as a sacrifice to Molech in the valley of Ben Hinnom – the socially acceptable way to get rid of unwanted babies (society always finds a way to do that). You would even be praised for your religious conviction. He consulted fortune-tellers and those who claim to speak to the dead. He built altars in the temple for worshiping other gods and all the “host of heaven.” He carved a statue of his own making (his own personal god) and put it in the temple.

God sent His prophets, but Manasseh would not listen to them. We look at the world around us and realize that nothing has changed. This is our modern culture in a nutshell. Putting on the appearance that you are very religious, but avoiding what God actually says because you want to do the things you want to do; live the life the way you want to live it; worship the god of your own making; picking and choosing which parts of His character or His Word you like and ignoring the rest; making sin socially acceptable. Our world has adopted this as the norm.

Because Manasseh chose to ignore the prophets of God speaking His Word, God got his attention in another way. He sent the Assyrians, who conquered Jerusalem, captured Manasseh, put a hook through his nose on a chain and walked him all the way to Babylon. Let's just say it was in Manasseh's best interest to not fall behind.

Having been humbled, Manasseh comes to know that there is but one God. He repents. God restores him and Manasseh goes back to Jerusalem and, like in the days of his father Hezekiah, there is a reformation. The false altars are torn down. The false teaching was no longer officially tolerated.

However Manasseh dies and his son named Amon becomes king at the age of 22. Rule of thumb – never put a 22 year old in charge of a country. He only ruled for two years. In two years, he undid the reforms of Manasseh. It seems that the people who grew up in an environment where false teaching was tolerated and promoted were not eager to change and seek out the truth. It seems that changing the hearts of the people who did not get a hook through their nose was more challenging.

Amon has a son named Josiah who becomes king at the age of 8 years old. Josiah does not have full authority until he reaches the age of 20. But Josiah is devout and faithful (apparently there is no rule of thumb when it comes to age after all). Josiah, when he turns 20, has a reformation. All of the false altars were torn down. The idols were smashed into pieces. All of Judah and Jerusalem was cleansed of the worship of gods who are not God.

The temple is still unusable. It has been about 75 years since the temple was functioning according to the covenant under King Hezekiah. The covenant was not even remembered, until, the repair workers at the temple find the Book of the Law, the Torah, Moses' writings. And the book is brought to the king and they read it to him. This is six years after

Josiah's reformation. And Josiah tears his robe because he now sees how far he is from fulfilling God's desire for himself and the people.

And Josiah reintroduces the Passover and the blood sacrifices for the forgiveness of sins as God prescribed them in His covenant. That first year, there were 3000 bulls and 30,000 sheep. And all my 7<sup>th</sup> graders said, "Ew!" That is a lot of blood.

The point of all this, as we acknowledge the Reformation of our church, is that the church is always in need of reform. Sometimes, like Hezekiah, we know what we need to do and we do it right away. We do it faithfully, but we have no control on what will happen in the days to come. Be faithful today. That is the best thing you can do for tomorrow. God's church is not protected by dynasty. God's church struggles from generation to generation. God's church is always in need of reform. Be faithful today.

Through all of these struggles, our Lord has always preserved and protected His children. Unfortunately, Manasseh or Amon will always come, and our sinful nature usually likes to hear what false teachers have to say. Paul describes this as our "itching ears." As the church is always in need of reform, we pray that it does not require a "hook through the nose" to get the attention of those wandering from the truth.

And even when we strive to be completely faithful, like Josiah, we are reminded of how far we fall short of the glory of God. We are justified by His grace as a gift. When Luther brought about his reformation of the church, the message of God's free gift of grace, which had been hidden away like the Book of the Law was in Josiah's day, that was the message which resonated with the people of God, because that is the Gospel. We are saved by grace, through faith, it is a gift from God – not by works; by the blood of Jesus Christ – the one and only Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Be faithful and have confidence in this Word today. Amen.