

“The Word of God Must Be Preached”

Romans 3:19-28

Fear not! The sermon will be in English – at least most of it. As we were planning for this day, several people asked why we were having a German service to celebrate the 75th Anniversary of Our Redeemer when this congregation never had services in German in its history. In fact, around the time our church was established in 1940, it was increasingly unpopular to have gatherings of people speaking German – even when the gatherings were for the sole purpose of preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

So why German this morning? Today, we are not only celebrating the 75 years of the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ being proclaimed here at Our Redeemer, but this is the day that we celebrate the Reformation of Christ’s Church. The end of October has traditionally been chosen because Luther nailed the 95 Theses (these statements for debate concerning the sale of indulgences); he nailed them to the Wittenburg Church door on October 31, 1517.

That event has garnered much attention throughout the years, but it was publishing the translation of the New Testament into German in 1522 that changed the world. The Word of God could be heard in the language of the people. The saving grace of God was spoken in words that the people could actually

understand. Before Luther, most priests had never even read a Bible.

Just imagine if our liturgy and hymns and everything I said was in German each week, and the right hand column wasn't there. Hearing the Gospel would be a struggle. There is a reason that Luther fought to get the worship service and the Word of God into the language of the German people. There is a reason that this little mission church on the north side of Quincy always had services in English – even though this was a mission of St. James Lutheran Church which had German services.

St. Paul says, “I would rather speak five intelligible words than 10,000 words in a tongue.” Paul dealt with this same issue. There were those in the Early Church, including much of the leadership, who spoke Hebrew and they would desire to enlighten the Greek barbarians with words from the Old Testament in Hebrew, because Hebrew is the language spoken in heaven. It is the tongue of angels (according to the Jews – and one of my Hebrew professors).

But if I say to you (the great shema from Deut. 6 – shema Yisrael . . .) but do not explain what it means, (“Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One – it's sort of the Jn. 3:16 of the OT); if I don't explain what it means, then I have not proclaimed the Word of God in a meaningful way. This would be the one way where there would be the risk that the Word of God could return empty.

If we did not have the right hand column in today's bulletin, if I spent my sermon attempting to muddle through a German sermon when the reality is *meine Deutsche ist nicht so gut*. Ich

spreche ein bichen (I speak a little bit) but the reality is, that would not be the best way for the Gospel, the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ to be proclaimed.

And that is what the Reformation of Christ's Church is about. That is what the 75 years of ministry here at Our Redeemer has been about. The Word of God, the Gospel of God in the fullness of its truth must be proclaimed and must be heard. This is why I chose to keep the readings in English. This is why the Words of Institution will be in English. The Gospel of God must be rightly proclaimed. It must be heard.

As we heard last week, a story told by Pastor Troxel, this congregation had very humble beginnings, starting in 1932 as a St. James' Sunday School mission to the north side at Durst's Dairy (24th and Broadway); it began with two boys (Kenneth and Walter Sheer) coming to hear God's Word. Then more children came. Then the vicars from the St. Louis Seminary held worship services, and the parents and children came.

And then one of those vicars named E. J. Otto came back and served as the pastor and preached the Word of God for 42 years. This congregation did not grow and succeed because those people executed a clever plan. Whether it was at Durst's Dairy, or the Old Chapel built in 1942, or here in this sanctuary for the past 53 years; wherever it is that the Word of God has been proclaimed on the North side of Quincy, God's Word has not returned empty. The one thing that is needed is that the Word of God is proclaimed, the Word of God is heard, and the Word of God is received.

St. Paul says, “For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.” As Paul says elsewhere, “Faith comes by hearing.” Justice, righteousness, salvation, freedom in Christ all come by faith – not faith in ourselves, not faith in what we can do. This celebration of 75 years of ministry at Our Redeemer is not a celebration of what the pastors or members of this church have done.

Like the celebration of the Reformation is not a celebration of what Martin Luther has done. This is a celebration of what God has done, through His Word. We are justified by grace as a gift. The faith we rejoice in, the faith we participate in today is faith in God created in you by the Holy Spirit revealing the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ to you through God’s Word – His preached Word and the Word joined to the elements of the Sacraments.

This morning, using the less formal liturgy of the 19th and early 20th Century, we only read two lessons – the Epistle and the Gospel. The traditional first reading for Reformation Day is from Revelation 14: “Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people.”

Why do we have a German service today? It is a reminder that the eternal Gospel must be proclaimed to every people, in every nation, in every language. This eternal Word must be preached. This Word of salvation must be heard. This Word of life must be received in faith. Amen.