

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Quincy, IL
Rev. Martin R. Eden

Pentecost 21 – Reformation Day
Saturday, October 24, 2020 at 5:00 p.m.
Sunday, October 25, 2020 at 9:00 a.m.

“This is Important”

Romans 3:19-28

The celebration of the Reformation is not a day of boasting about Martin Luther. What we celebrate today is the important work of God continually reforming His church. The church is always in need of reform. The church will never be pure and pristine – as Paul says, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” As I like to say, “I can make you a member of a perfect, pure, pristine church, but to do that, I would have to kill you.” Only when you enter the Church Triumphant will you see a perfect church. (Paul is more eloquent than I am). However, one of the marks of the true church on earth is the striving for pure doctrine. The church is always in need of reform.

Our challenge in the church today is somewhat different than the challenges Martin Luther faced, but we are still fighting the same enemy. We still battle against works-righteousness. There are not any “indulgences” being sold on the streets of Quincy (to my knowledge), but you are kidding yourself if you don’t think that most people are looking for a way to provide for their own salvation “through the works of the law” and outside of the death and resurrection of Christ.

During this political season, there are many who are tired of hearing about

polls. However, I will share a few with you. In 1968, the year I was born, a Gallup Poll showed that 98% of Americans believed in God. More recent polls show that number to be down to 80-90% depending on how the question is worded. Among young people (18-29 year olds) less than 70% believe there is anything beyond the physical world.

The poll that caught my attention was one from a few years ago showing 90% of people believe in heaven. 85% of those polled believe they will end up there. (I don't know about the 5%. You would think that would be important. That is one out of every 20 people).

In our life we are confronted with many things that we list as being important. When raising your children, you know that they will not always do what is right. No child is perfect. So then, as a parent, do you say, "Since they are going to sin and fall short of the glory of God, it doesn't matter what they do. They can do what they want. Whatever makes them happy is fine."? Of course you don't do that. Teaching them and disciplining them is important. It takes time and years of instruction for someone to mature and grow so that they have the tools to deal with the trials and difficulties of this sinful world.

One important thing you teach your children is how to eat healthy. What if you let your children eat whatever they wanted – and you made available for their consumption pizza, chicken McNuggets, hot fudge sundaes, Mt. Dew, and Monster Energy drinks. What if those were always available. You also made available apples (other fruits), grilled asparagus (other vegetables), lean meat, bread, potatoes. Which would they choose if all of these options were always available and you gave them no boundaries?

What would Christ's church look like if the children of God in Christ's church

were given no boundaries, no real guidance? What would the church look like if we did not confess the Creeds, did not look for guidance in Luther's Catechisms or the rest of the Book of Concord which gives a systematic organization to the teachings of the Bible and are writings that have stood the test of time?

I said before that our challenge in the church today is somewhat different than the challenges Martin Luther faced. The church Luther sought to reform presented Christ as a vindictive judge who sat up in heaven looking to throw sinners like you and me into hell (or at least purgatory so you could work off your punishment).

The church in need of reform today presents Christ as being unimportant. Another poll of those who call themselves Christians shows that 70% of them believe that most all religions lead you to the same God. (70% of those who call themselves Christian, according to this poll do not actually believe the words of the Nicene Creed, or really of the Apostle's Creed, and certainly not the Athanasian Creed. If you do not confess the faith of Christ's one, holy, apostolic Church, you are separated from Christ's one, holy, apostolic Church.

Other studies show that a wide swath of those who call themselves Christian say that the reason Jesus came was to teach you how to "be the best you that you can be." That sounds a lot like the "works of the law." That is the theological equivalent of a meal of chicken McNuggets and Mt. Dew.

Another troubling poll, a very recent poll, shows that 56% of Christians believe that you get to heaven by doing good and being a good person. Where is Jesus in all of this? If the death and resurrection of Jesus is unimportant for your salvation, then what we do here is unimportant.

C. S. Lewis famously said, "Christianity, if false, is of no importance, and if

true, of infinite importance. The only thing it cannot be is moderately important.” The church is always in need of reform because so many who claim to be within the church treat Christ, His death, His resurrection, and their own adoption as a child of God through the waters of Baptism as a matter of moderate importance. “I believe in heaven, but I probably won’t get there.”

By C. S. Lewis’ definition, since Christianity cannot be moderately important, those who treat Christ with casual attention are actually declaring Him to be of no importance. This makes sense that if a person believes that their own works are what actually makes them pleasing to God or will give them a path to heaven, then Jesus can be an afterthought, and you can still think of yourself as a Christian.

But Paul disagrees. Our boasting is excluded. “We are saved by grace through faith alone, apart from works. It is a gift from God, lest any man should boast,” as Paul says in his letter to the Ephesians. As we hear him say in our reading today, we are “justified by faith apart from works of the law.”

This was the heart of the fight to reform the church in the 16th Century. Unfortunately, it is necessary for us to fight the same enemy, but on a different front. This Reformation Day, we celebrate the reforming of the church through the centuries. But our concern must be the church of the present and of the future. Raise your children and grandchildren to know that God’s Word is important. Tell your neighbor that Christ’s death and resurrection are important. Always know that in God’s eyes, your presence in His Kingdom is important. Amen.