

Reformation

Psalm 85

2 Chronicles 29:12-19

Revelation 14:6-7

Matthew 11:12-15

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

Dearly beloved in the Lord. Wherever and whenever the everlasting gospel is preached on earth, there is sure to be violence in the kingdom of heaven on earth, meaning the church. There are two kinds of violence. On the one hand is the violence the kingdom of heaven suffers at the hands of those who commit idolatry and blaspheme the name of the Lord. This does not only happen out there in the world. It happens in the midst of the church, just as it did in the days of king Ahaz when he reigned in Judah. Ahaz did not do right in the sight of the Lord as his father David had. Instead, Ahaz made molded images for the Baals, burning his children in fire. For his wickedness the Lord delivered Ahaz into the hand of the king of Syria, as well as into the hand of the king of Israel, who defeated him with a great slaughter.

This, to also show that those who are enemies of God and the kingdom of heaven on earth do suffer violent consequences. Israel was not without blame and guilt, for the prophet Oded said to them:

Because the Lord your God was angry with Judah, He has delivered them into your hand; but you have killed them in a rage that reaches up to heaven. And now you propose to force the children of Judah and Jerusalem to be your male and female slaves; but are you not also guilty before the Lord your God. In the time of his distress, king Ahaz of Judah became increasingly unfaithful to the Lord, for he sacrificed to the gods of Damascus which had defeated him. And so the kingdom of heaven suffered more violence, as Ahaz gathered the articles of the house of God, cut in pieces the articles of the house of God, shut up the doors of the house of the Lord, and made himself altars in every corner in Jerusalem.

After the apostasy of Ahaz, Hezekiah became king, doing what was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father David had done. It was time for reformation in the church, in the house of God. The wrath of the Lord had fallen upon Judah and Jerusalem, for they had fallen by the sword, and were in captivity. Hezekiah was determined to make a covenant with the Lord. The Levites arose, and the priests went into the inner part of the house of the Lord to cleanse it, and brought out all the debris that they found in the temple of the Lord. They sanctified the house of the Lord for eight days, and were finished on the sixteenth of the first month. Hezekiah restored the temple worship, a sin offering was made from slaughtered animals, and orthodox worship returned according to the commandment of the Lord by His prophets.

The return of the animal sacrifices according to the commandment of the Lord by His prophets is also violence in the kingdom of heaven, for it is only by sacrifice that salvation is won for the world. Through

the violence of slaughtered animals in the Old Testament, the blood of bulls and goats and rams, atonement was made according to the word of the Lord. That violent atonement made in the Old Testament foreshadowed the atonement made on the cross in the violent death of the Son of Man, whose blood was poured out for the sin of the world. There is no remission of sins without the shedding of blood, and the shedding of blood is violent. Just as the blood of righteous Abel cries out from the earth, and the blood of the prophets, including Zechariah, who was murdered between the temple and the altar, so also Jesus' blood cries out in violent victory.

There is no victory without violence, no forgiveness of sins without the shedding of blood. And so Jesus says, *And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force.* John the Baptist himself was beheaded for telling Herod that it was not lawful for him to have his brother's wife. *For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John.* Wherever and whenever the everlasting gospel is preached, there will be violence in the kingdom of heaven. This is not the heaven where everlasting righteousness and blessedness reign for eternity with Jesus. This is the heaven which is on earth, for as John says in Revelation: *Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth.*

It is on earth that the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, as it once again did in the days of the medieval church, when indulgences reigned as a way to earn time out of purgatory if only the price was right, and when the gospel was being snuffed out in many places. It

was a time when the sacrament was turned into another sacrifice, when grace plus human works were believed to justify in the sight of God. It was time for another reformation in the church in the 15th century. But do not be deceived. Luther did not invent the gospel, for the gospel is everlasting. He did, however, fight for the return of the gospel, fight for the truth, and in the face of wickedness and evil, he refused to recant teachings which were, and still are in agreement with the Word of God. You are saved by grace through faith, and this is not your own doing...it is the gift of God, not by works, so that you would not boast.

There is not one single sin for which Christ did not atone for on the cross in that violent sacrifice, that shedding of blood for the forgiveness of sins. The church is still in need of reformation. The church on earth is a militating church, a fighting church. As a Christian, you are compelled to fight. The fight is fierce and it is violent, but it is the sword of God's mouth that fights. It is the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God that puts down the false teachers who still in arrogance and pride take upon their lips the Word of God. By the grace of God His righteousness is credited to you by the gift of faith in Jesus Christ. *Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him, not falsely, but in spirit and truth, for God has re-created you in the waters of holy baptism, and feeds and sustains your faith in His body and blood.*

In the name of Jesus. Amen.