

Sermon for October 26th, 2025
REFORMATION SUNDAY

READINGS

Revelation 14:6-13

6 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. **7** And he said with a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come, and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water."

8 Another angel, a second, followed, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who made all nations drink the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality." **9** And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, **10** he also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. **11** And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name."

12 Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.

13 And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Blessed indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!"

Psalms 46

- 1** God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.
- 2** Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way,
though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea,
3 though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains tremble at its swelling. *Selah*
- 4** There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy habitation of the Most High.
- 5** God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved;
God will help her when morning dawns.
- 6** The nations rage, the kingdoms totter;
he utters his voice, the earth melts.
- 7** The LORD of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress. *Selah*
- 8** Come, behold the works of the LORD,
how he has brought desolations on the earth.
- 9** He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;
he breaks the bow and shatters the spear;
he burns the chariots with fire.
- 10** "Be still, and know that I am God.
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth!"
- 11** The LORD of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress. *Selah*

Romans 3:19-28

19 Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. **20** For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. **21** But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— **22** the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: **23** for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, **24** and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, **25** whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. **26** It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. **27** Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. **28** For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.

Matthew 11:11-19

11 “Truly I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. **12** From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force. **13** For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John, **14** and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come. **15** He who has ears to hear, let him hear. **16** “But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their playmates,
17 “‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance;
we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.’” **18** For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon.’ **19** The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds.”

Our text for meditation this Reformation Sunday is on our Gospel reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Introduction

I had a conversation with a Roman Catholic man a few years back, and the discussion turned to religion. Naturally that turned into a friendly debate between our denominations. Now whenever you have a debate between Lutheranism and papism, the entire discussion will hinge on authority over matters of truth. As Lutherans, we confess *Sola Scriptura*, that the sole source of all dogma and morals is the Bible; any doctrine which *adds* to it or *takes away* from it is at best non-binding, but in most cases it is false. We accept nothing as doctrine which does not come from Scripture. The papist disagrees of course, believing that his church – and especially his pope – are so guided by the Holy Spirit that they can create or define new doctrines at will and be guaranteed that it is true.

So over the course of our discussion, the catholic brought up an interesting argument. “You believe in *Sola Scriptura*? Fine. Show me, where are Protestants in the Bible?” Now that sounds kind of funny, but he meant it seriously and it was a good question. You see, he could point to an established Church, but he did not know where there was anyone protesting that Church that God accepted. He has a point, if we are thinking about specific organizations. There are no groups *calling* themselves Protestants in Scripture, but to his dismay I was able to show them exactly where the Protestants were, and I started with our Gospel reading for today.

John the Baptist, Protestant

Our Savior begins by saying that no one has arisen that is greater than John the Baptist – except Jesus Himself. When He says “the one who is least in the kingdom of Heaven is greater than he,” what Christ means by that is that though He is Divine, Christ made Himself the lowest of men and most humble so that He could accomplish the plan of salvation. But aside from Jesus, John the Baptist was greater than anyone living. Why is this the case?

In his day, John the Baptist contested the ruling religious authorities who had become corrupt, the church of his times. This was not because they had no authority, but because the entirety of the institution needed reform. He corrected their theology, and stood at the bank of the Jordan to call *everyone* to repentance. He condemned the pharisee and the sadducee alike as vipers, and warned against their belief that Abrahamic lineage guaranteed salvation or prosperity.¹ He warned that the wrath of God was something to *flee*, not something from which we could earn clemency with our merit or heritage. He called everyone to be baptized with a baptism of repentance, instructing everyone to amend their ways in preparation for the Deliverer; St. Luke also records that he preached *Gospel* to them.²

These are all things define the Protestant. We do our best to witness to everyone both inside and outside the Church, directing them to true doctrine and correcting the places that the Church has erred. We advocate for both religious and societal reforms, and we *do not care* if some old dusty institution says we cannot do it, for we are called to loyalty to God over any established church. John the Baptist was not part of the organized religious structure of his day. He was not ordained through the “proper organizational procedures,” did not launch his protest through the “proper channels,” did not bow the knee to the high priest, and did not follow the extrabiblical rules that the pharisees cooked up. All that he proclaimed was the Word of God Almighty, and the only thing he cared about was showing God's love to the people by exhorting them to *faith*.

Elijah the Prophet, Protestant

Our Lord Jesus tells the crowd that “the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force.” The Church of their day, the ruling religious authorities, had the backing of the Roman Empire with all of their military might; priesthoods were bought and sold, and no one could raise their voices about it without risking their lives. To the Empire, religion was not about loyalty to God, but a way to keep the people quiet; the jewish authorities were more than happy to collude with them to make this a reality. And what does God do when the Church starts serving the state and saying what the state wants and following after state morality? Well, He sends a Protestant.

It is not just John the Baptist who is a Biblical Protestant, but Elijah as well. Christ says that John is “Elijah who is to come.” Not that the two are the same *person*, but they have the same *spirit*, the same *purpose*, and similar enough circumstances that such a Protestant figure was necessary. Elijah was tasked with bringing the Northern Israelites to repentance after they had begun to worship the false god baal.³ The Kingdom of God was placed under the pagan rulership of Jezebel and her thug prophets, and all the *true* servants of God were either martyred or sent off into hiding. Like John the Baptist, Elijah was not part of the prevailing religious institutions of his day; he had no part in the golden calves of Samaria, and he accepted none of their false teachings that blended pagan doctrines with what the Bible teaches. He did not – *shocker of shockers* – go to seminary either. But he stood up, proclaimed the Word, demanded an end to the corruptions and abuses of his day and exhorted all people to live according to God's ways.

Elijah represents *all* of the prophets here, by the way. Almost universally the prophets of old did

1 Matthew 3:7-10

2 Luke 3:3-18

3 1 Kings 17-18

exactly what Elijah and John the Baptist did; protest an erring Church that had been taken over by force, exhort people to repentance, engage in independent worship, and preach the Gospel. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Amos, Hosea, and more, all of these men preached the Solas and went up against the establishment, becoming a different sort of spiritual leader than most men are used to. *Whenever it gets this bad, God sends a Protestant.*

The Response of the People

We have seen this play out many times in Church history. Athanasius fought against the mass acceptance of the Arian heresy, William of Ockham protested the opulent luxuries of Rome, and no one could forget Luther's efforts to bring about reform in the Church. Each time this happens though, they are met with the same dynamic that our Savior complains about in the midst of His message. Yes, some people followed the Lord at the encouragement of John the Baptist; so too did a good number of people listen to Athanasius, William, and Luther. But by and large the masses of people out there resist the idea that something could be wrong in the first place.

“We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.” In other words, the people were *uncomfortable*, because John the Baptist did not act the way *they* wanted him to. He stubbornly refused to conform to their go-along-to-get-along way of living, calling them to conform to the message *he* was preaching instead. John would not play their games, so they refused to repent; instead they simply concluded that he had a demon. Then Christ Himself comes along. Jesus is humble enough to reach tax collectors, prostitutes, bums and criminals with a message of repentance and faith, and this makes the crowd more worried. John was too strict, but Jesus wasn't strict enough for them! Neither would follow the established culture, so the people were perplexed and would not listen.

Our Lord ends the passage by saying “wisdom is justified by her deeds.” This is to say, the wise man listens to and follows the one God has sent. The wisest men and women in Judea heard John the Baptist's message, got baptized, and changed their lives for the better. When he was taken into custody by Herod, the wisest people in Judea listened to Jesus and followed *His* ways. It is not wisdom to go with the crowd during times of corruption, beloved. It is wisdom to follow after God.

As it Stands Today

As it stands today, the Protestant is more necessary than ever before. Few denominations calling themselves Christian are *actually* Christian. Far too many of them have imbibed worldly doctrines, worldly morality, and worldly priorities. They scream from the rooftops that we have to take in every refugee from every poor place, but never say a word about the fate of their souls. They tell us that “love wins,” when all their kind of love is winning for them is diseases and molested children. The papacy has given up none of her errors but only added more, while many historic Protestant branches have hollowed out their doctrines to make room for things Rome approves of – mass universal tolerance of absolutely everything, ecumenism, the dissolution of borders, and robbing the Godly to pay the godless. The conditions of the Church are so decrepit and corrupt that we have had to establish this present Catacomb Synod just so that people could keep receiving Word and Sacrament.

The good news is, we stand in good company when we struggle against this corruption. If you are here amid the Catacomb Synod, you belong to the great heritage of believers who *don't* go along to get along. You belong in the company of Elijah and the John the Baptist, men who foresaw the coming Christ and *followed* where He led them instead of saying “We played the flute for you, and you did not dance.” Elijah won though. John won. And so too shall we, with patience and steadfastness, see victory through the movements and actions of our Lord Jesus.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.