

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
The Festival of the Reformation, October 30, 2011

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)
Hymns: 266, 370:1, 262, 264, 644.
Lessons: Psalms 46 , Romans 3:19-28, John 8:21 -47.
Sermon Text: John 8:31-32.
Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Pontius Pilate asked Jesus *“What is truth?”* in John 18. The Jews seeking to kill Jesus had said he was a king. *“You are a king, then!” said Pilate. Jesus answered, “You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.” “What is truth?” Pilate asked. With this he went out again to the Jews and said, “I find no basis for a charge against him.”* John 18:37-38

Pilate asked the question, and we don’t know if he really wanted an answer. He may have been expressing the frustration of the world in not knowing what the truth is. Pilate was a politician in a foreign land and may have had some warped ideas of what really is truth and what the truth could accomplish. He went out and told the Jews the truth: He found no basis for the accusation against Jesus. But you know the rest of the story. The people Pilate talked to that day were typical human beings who have no desire for God’s truth. They had no use for what we are going to talk about this morning:

Truth – “the truth of God’s Word” – is just one of the ideas that was restored to the world at the time of the Reformation. There is so much that we have to be thankful for as we celebrate the beginning of the Reformation. The Reformation began quite simply. A Roman Catholic teacher of theology named Martin Luther on October 31, 1517, proposed a debate specifically on the subject of indulgences as they were being sold by Roman Catholic preachers. People were led to believe that *Indulgences were “Get out of Jail Free” cards issued for sale by the Catholic Pope in Rome that allowed you to think you were buying your way into Heaven.* http://wiki.answers.com/Q/What_was_the_sale_of_indulgences Today the Roman Catholic Church would dispute that definition but people in Luther’s day were buying such pieces of paper with that understanding. There were men who were selling indulgences. They were making lots of money for the church, and deceiving people into thinking they could buy the forgiveness of sins. Luther had learned from the Word of God the truth that

THE WORD OF GOD TEACHES US GOD FORGIVES SINS FOR JESUS SAKE.

- 1. Truth.**
- 2. The Word of God – the Bible – IS truth.**
- 3. Justification by Faith**

Long before an election, candidates for political office are campaigning and making many claims. Everyone who can read, and hear, and who watches television could not really miss the fact that many politicians say many things. But how much of what they are saying is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth? We hear half-truths, words and ideas taken out of context, conclusions about what someone said or did, and we sometimes just don’t know what to believe. I really wonder if such candidates and the people creating their advertising really know the eighth commandment of God which tells us **“You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.** *What does this mean?* We should fear and love God that we do not tell lies about our neighbor, betray him, or give him a bad name, but defend him, speak well of him, and take his words and actions in the kindest possible way.”

So sometimes in the matter of whom to vote for we really don't know what is true. So if you really want to know the whole truth, I don't think you could find it by listening to political advertisements.

But Martin Luther uncovered truth for us – God's truth. Because God worked through Martin Luther, the truth of the Word of God became available for mankind in the 1500s. With the hymn writer we rejoice "O God, Our Lord, Thy holy Word was long a hidden treasure Till to its place it was by grace restored in fullest measure. For this today our thanks we say and gladly glorify Thee." (The Lutheran Hymnal, 266:1)

What is the truth? This (Hold up the Bible) is truth. The Bible is true from beginning to end, and the Bible will continue to be true until the end of time – even into eternity.

The truth that God revealed again to the world through the teachings of Martin Luther comes from the word of God. That truth includes the fact that we are children of the heavenly father because of his Word. And how have we become children of God? God's Word says in Galatians 3:26 ***"You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus."***

In our sermon text Jesus is speaking ***"To the Jews who had believed him."*** He is also speaking to us today. He makes it very clear that ***"If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples."*** The Greek word translated hold to means "to continue in, to abide in, to remain in, to dwell in."

Jesus makes it very clear from these words who is really a disciple of his. A disciple is one who follows him. There are many who believed the truths that you are hearing today, and the truths contained in God's Word. The truth is taught in this church Sunday after Sunday. That is my calling – not to tell you my opinions, but to tell you "This is what the Lord God says." And yet many do not continue in Jesus teaching. In the same way that I cannot be a hunter or a fisherman if I do not do those things, in the same way if I do not continue in Jesus' words, I cannot really be a Christian, a believer. Jesus is very blunt when he tells us in Luke 10:16: ***"He who listens to you listens to me; he who rejects you rejects me; but he who rejects me rejects him who sent me."*** In the same way, Jesus later in this same chapter tells us, as you heard in our gospel lesson: ***"He who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God."*** John 8:47

Do I hold to Jesus' teaching and continue in Jesus' teaching if I do not hear it? Do I hold to Jesus' teaching if I do not let Jesus' teachings be seen in my life? Do I hold to Jesus' teaching if I ignore opportunities to hear the teaching of Jesus? I think you really know the answer. The answer is NO! We are constantly reaching out to those whose lives are such that they, by appearances, are not his disciples.

You are here today to hear the truth. And the truth includes the fact that ***"This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."*** Romans 3:22-23

We know that. We recognize that every time we look in the mirror of God's law. We recognize that we are sinners, yes miserable sinners, because our sins make us miserable. The one thing that makes people miserable really is sin. It is going to be first of all our own sins and secondly all the sins in the world. Our sins make us feel guilty. All the sins of the world make it difficult for us – for anyone – to live peaceably in this sinful world. Even if we were not Christians, there is always someone out there who wants to take our property and possessions to make themselves richer. Even if we were not Christians, there is always someone out there who wants to hurt us, in actions or in words. Sometimes they do this just to make themselves feel better and yet where there is even the least knowledge of the law of God, there would be some guilt and shame.

Because we - the people gathered here today – claim to be Christians, and confess that we are God's children, we recognize that there are people and forces out there that want to destroy us – just because we are God's children. These forces include the unbelieving world and Satan, the devil. They will give the child of God no peace. They will seek to drag us to eternal damnation. Satan knows that he is damned eternally. He knows that he has no hope of heaven. And so in his furious anger – he walks around as a roaring lion seeking to devour everyone, especially believers in God – he wants to drag as many people as he can with him.

Yes, the truth that we are sinners, troubles us. But there is even more truth that is more important to us. ***"If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."*** Jesus tells us that because we are his disciples we will know the truth. Those who are not disciples of Jesus do not know the truth, the truth that saves them eternally.

A few moments ago I told you that God's truthful word says "***There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.***" But the very next verse gives hope. The Bible goes on: "***and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.***"

That word "justified" means "declared not guilty". God is a judge who looks at you and says 'I know you are guilty. But I am declaring you not guilty, innocent, and you are free because my own son paid the guilt you have. Your sins are forgiven for Jesus' sake, because of what Jesus did.'

That is truth. That truth comes from the word of God. That is the truth that sets us free.

The truth that sets us free is the truth about Jesus Christ. In the words of the apostolic Creed this morning we confessed this truth about Jesus Christ. The word of God teaches us more about Jesus Christ, much more, but the most important fact is that God sent his son into the world to save sinners. Saint Paul confessed: "***Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners-of whom I am the worst.***" 1 Timothy 1:15

And how is it that Jesus saves sinners? Well you confessed in the Creed that he was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried. He rose again from the dead. Jesus Christ died freeing mankind from all their sins, after living the perfect life they could not live. So the innocent was executed in place of the guilty. And the guilty? They go free. They have been justified by God, they have been declared not guilty by God. They have been justified, that is, declared 'not guilty'. It is as if they have a letter engraved upon their hearts, a letter that says this person is not guilty of all the sins he has committed or she has committed. And how is this yours? Simply by believing. "***Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.***" Mark 16:16

This is justification, and this justification is yours by faith, simply by believing it. God, the righteous judge, has declared you not guilty. And because you are not guilty, you will receive eternal life in heaven. Because you are not guilty, you are free, free from death, free from eternal damnation, free from all the power and accusations of the devil. You are free from sin, and you know you really want to live like that. Repent, believe this, turn away from sin and let your life may show the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

In the Reformation the truth of the Word of God was revealed once again to a mankind that was under the thumb of the Roman Catholic Church, leading them away from the word of God and piling upon them human rules, regulations, and laws.

In the Reformation the Word of God was revealed once again to a mankind which had lost the truth of the Word of God.

In the Reformation justification by faith was revealed once again to a mankind who had been taught by the only church that existed, that the only way to get to eternal life in heaven was by doing good deeds. In the Reformation this plain truth from the Word of God, from Ephesians 2:8-10 was revealed to mankind again: "***For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.***"

May we hold to Jesus' teaching, cling to it, remain in it, continue in it.

May we rejoice in the truth of the Word of God! And may we rejoice, celebrate, and proclaim that good news to all who will listen. Amen.