

Message for Reformation, 10/25/2009

Lessons: Rev. 14: 6-7, Romans 3: 19-28, John 8: 31-36

Introduction

Have you ever used the phrase ‘Oh, my goodness’, as an expression of amazement or surprise or astonishment? I think most of us have in one form or another. Well, out of curiosity, I Googled that phrase the other day to learn where the phrase came from. I learned that it developed as sort-of-a talisman, a superstition during the Middle Ages for personal protection. The phrase assumes, what a lot of people wrongly assume, that a person has some kind of innate, natural goodness of their own which they can rely on to ward off harm or danger or trials or tribulations in life.

The Lutheran Reformation which we are observing this final full week end of October was a frontal attack upon such superstitions of the Middle Ages’, like ‘Oh, my goodness’ being a talisman to ward off troubles.

A young professor/priest by the name of Martin Luther nailed a sheet of 95 statements to the doors of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany. Luther’s 95 Thesis were written in reaction to the arrival in Saxony of a Roman Catholic monk by the name of John Tetzel. Pope Leo X wanted to finish the great St. Peter’s Cathedral in Rome. So to raise money for that project, men like John Tetzel were sent out to prey on the superstitious beliefs of people and lead them to purchase indulgences. These were pieces of paper which a person could purchase in order to shorten or even spare a person’s or a loved one’s soul from an imaginary place called purgatory – the purging place between heaven and hell. By buying indulgences, people were superstitiously buying into the idea that, on the basis of ‘Oh, my goodness,’ they could appease Almighty God.

Luther, a professor of the Bible at Wittenberg University, was concerned about the deception of these indulgences feeding on people’s superstitions. So, Luther being a professor of Theology, wrote 95 statements or thesis on the question of repentance and forgiveness. He nailed them to the Castle Church doors on Oct. 31, the Hallowed Eve before Nov. 1, All Saints Day, knowing people would be coming to church and would read his invitation to debate his thesis. Well, the mass media of Luther’s day, the moveable printing press, got hold of these 95 Thesis and copies spread all over Europe, even to the Pope in Rome. Not as fast as Google on our internet, but very fast in its day and age. Thus began **THE LUTHERAN REFORMATION** which we are celebrating this weekend at Immanuel Lutheran.

OH! MY GOODNESS? NO! IT’S ALL GOD’S GOODNESS – GOD’S GRACE IN JESUS CHRIST!
And that is what I want to talk to you about a little bit today, primarily based upon our epistle lesson:

**Romans 3 ‘for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God
and are justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus’**

I.

Bill, was the father of two children who attended the local Lutheran School. Bill and his wife Nancy weren’t Lutheran. But, because of the student/teacher ratio and family orientated activities they decided to send

their kids to the Lutheran School. Bill and Nancy were having some marriage and financial problems. So, they went to talk to their church's Pastor, who told Bill and Nancy that if their faith was stronger, they wouldn't be having these problems. Bill felt guilty for not spending more time with his wife. He wanted to be a good husband and Dad. He tried, he really did. And now he felt guilty because he didn't have enough faith. 'Oh, my goodness' he thought, I have to get things turned around or I'll lose everything. So, Bill began to spend more time and more money on his kids and wife. He tried hard to focus more of his thoughts and ideas on 'what would Jesus do?' But, that guilt remained. In our epistle lesson from **Romans 3**, God's Word tells us this is the way things are going to be as we live our lives based upon what we must do with Jesus as our good example to follow. Earlier in **Romans 3** the Apostle Paul writes '**There is no one righteous, not even one ... there is no one who does good**'. In other words the talisman principle 'Oh, my goodness' just doesn't work. So then what do we do? So then what does work?

II.

What works is God's Word. The very Word of God inspired by the Holy Spirit to the Apostle Paul, the very Word of God which Martin Luther learned and experienced and shared back in Wittenburg, Germany with his 95 Thesis, the very Word of God, which your Pastor is sharing with you today. God's Word works!

Romans 3 verse 21 introduces the life changing good news of God's Word with two of the mightiest, most powerful words in the entire Bible, '**BUT, NOW**'. '**But, now**' right now! Today! With whatever issues or trials or tribulations you are dealing with, '**the righteousness of God has been manifested = has been made known ... the righteousness of God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe**'. There it is! It's not 'Oh, my goodness', it's 'Oh, Christ's goodness'. Bill, kept working and working on his marriage, his finances, his family, his faith, but even seeing some progress his guilt remained. Dropping his kids off at Lutheran School one day, he saw the Pastor at the door greeting the kids. So he decided to make an appointment to visit with the Pastor. Bill sat in the Pastor's study recounting his struggles in his marriage and family and finances and with his faith. 'Pastor, I try and try and try hard. I want things to work, but I can't get rid of this guilt that I haven't done enough. Oh, my goodness! What is it God expects of me anyway? I'm just so tired of trying'. To Bill's total surprise the Pastor said 'he knew exactly what Bill was saying, because he had felt the same way in his own life many, many times'. And the Pastor took Bill to the words of our epistle lesson for today, **Romans 3**. This Word of God brought an entire Reformation to the Holy Christian Church in Luther's day. And it's this same Word of God which brought an entire reformation to Bill's life and to our lives, also. The Pastor explained to Bill that God's Law commands us to be good, matter-a-fact God's Law demands us to be perfect. But, we can't, we fail, we sin, we're guilty even when we try our best. We need help, we need God's help and this is God's help = His Word which says '**we are justified in God's sight by God's grace received through faith**'. What would Jesus do? Jesus, who is God Himself in flesh and blood, did for us what we fail to do for ourselves. Jesus set things right between us and God by His sacrifice on the cross. Jesus lived for us. Jesus died for us. Jesus rose again for us, declaring us to be forgiven and righteous in

the sight of God. It's not our goodness. It is all Jesus' goodness. Simply hearing this, Bill, felt as though a tremendous weight was being lifted from him. 'So, it's not all about me and how hard I keep trying only to fail, it's all about what Jesus has done for me and He never fails?' Bill said to the Pastor. 'BINGO! You're right, Bill, it's not all about you or me, it's all about Jesus who loves us'. And that is the truth of God's Word which sets us free, free from our guilt, free from our failures, free from our mess ups, free from the condemnation of our sins.

III.

The Reformation of the Holy Christian Church continues today, as people like Bill, like you and me continue to hear that awesome Good News that we have been declared righteous in God's sight all and entirely for Jesus' sake. Our innocence before Almighty God is not really our own it's Christ's innocence given to us. It has been credited to us by God's grace. It has been received by us in the empty hand of faith. What Jesus suffered on the cross, God counts as though we suffered it. What Jesus did on the cross, God counts as though we have done it. As Jesus vicariously took our place, God hands down a sentence we do not deserve = NOT GUILTY, justified = just-if-I'd never sinned, never failed. This is grace = God's Riches At Christ's Expense! 'Oh, my goodness?' NO! **'Where then is boasting? It is excluded ... for we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the Law' (Romans 3: 27/28)** God by His grace has declared us sinners to be good in His sight all for Jesus' sake, matter-a-fact, God has declared us totally eligible for heaven because of Jesus' goodness given to us as a gift from Him in the water and Word of Holy Baptism, in the bread and wine and Word of Holy Communion, in the written and spoken Word of a book, the Holy Bible. Which you are hearing right now.

Conclusion

And what about Bill? Well, he still struggled in his marriage with Nancy. He still had his share of financial problems. He still tried hard to be a good Dad to his kids, but he still made many mistakes. But, Bill left the Pastor's study that day knowing he wasn't alone in his struggles. Bill's burden of guilt had been lifted, and Bill believed he would need God's strength and help. Because of Jesus' death and resurrection, Bill knew where he stood with God. God loved him. 'Oh, my goodness!' He wasn't left to his own devices and efforts to make everything right. Matter-a-fact Bill's marriage and family and finances could all go bad, even with his best efforts, but God would love him anyway and would love him always. Bill had God's promises. Bill had God's grace. Bill had God's forgiveness. Bill had God's help. Bill had God's Word on it! And so do we! That's the Lutheran Reformation which we celebrate today. Amen