

First Sunday Of End Time - Reformation Sunday

November 1, 2009

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

John 8:31

To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. (NIV)

I'd like you to listen to a quote that I found to be, well, perhaps I should just say a little bit shocking: "*Arguments based on Scripture miss the point. Scripture was written by mortals long ago...and doesn't reflect what many Christians now believe.*" Those words were written in the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel on August 27, 2009. They were spoken by a delegate at the ELCA convention debating over the issue of homosexual ordination. Is what this delegate had to say true? No, I am obviously not talking about the fallacy of Scriptures being a man-made outdated book. I'm asking: is this really true about what he says of many Christians? Do people that call themselves Christians really think this way? Do people who consider themselves disciples of Jesus believe that the Bible has become out of touch and useless for our doctrine and practice today? If this is what many believe all I have to say is: "*how sad!*" As it always has been God's Word is still under heavy attack.

In another poll conducted in America by Insight Express in May of 2009 it was noted that of those who considered themselves religious 50% said they rarely or never attend worship services. Gathering around God's Word on a regular basis is just not that high of a priority for them. Again how sad. As it has in the past, God's Word today is being neglected.

Dear fellow Lutherans, Jesus reminds us today what it means to be a Christian. Jesus sets us straight on what it is to follow Him. In just this one simple sentence Jesus teaches us what it really means to be one of His disciples. Today, as we celebrate the Reformation and the fact that God used Martin Luther to bring us back to His Word, let us hear His Word teach us: **Jesus' disciples hold onto His Words.**

There is much debate and commentary over exactly who the audience is Jesus is addressing with these words. Whether they are people who had believed but no longer do or true believers really doesn't change Jesus' point. Perhaps it is best to say Jesus was speaking to a whole group of people who had been following him for a bunch of different reasons. So with this one sentence Jesus clears the air about what it is to be His disciple. With this one sentence Jesus says a whole lot to us on this day we celebrate the Reformation. Jesus says: "***If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.***" This is what discipleship is all about - listening to Jesus' Word. Literally, the Greek reads "*if you abide or remain in my word truly my disciples you are.*" Jesus says if you want to stay connected to me, if you are going to follow me, if you are my disciple, you need to remain in my Word.

What is Jesus' Word? It is what He has left us by inspiration - the Bible. The Scriptures are God's Words - all of them. This is not some man-made book. Jesus calls it "*my word*" - "***my teaching.***" Since it is God's Word it is all true. Since the Scriptures are God's Word it is the only Word we can always trust. Since the Bible is Jesus' Word it is worth holding onto and defending with every ounce of energy we have in us. When

we take a stand on the Bible we are not defending our Lutheran doctrine or our teaching, we are defending Christ's teaching. We are being Jesus' disciples when we stand firm on *Sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone).

Jesus knows just how important His Word is if we are to have a relationship with Him. In Jesus' day He had to deal with people who added their own man-made laws onto His Word. On this day we are reminded of the age in which Luther lived - a time when the Word was taken out of the hands of the people. Again many man-made laws took the place of Jesus' words. Today, we live in a time when people freely add or subtract to God's Word putting in what they think should be and taking out what they don't want to hear. But getting away from the Word always tends to lead down the same sorry path - the path of work-righteousness. Getting away from God's Word leads people to think they can stand before God because of who they are or what they have done. People change God's standards so they can attain them or change God into who they think He should be.

But the truth we need to hear in God's Word and that remains whether people hold to it or not is what Jesus says just a few verses later: ***"I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin."*** That would include everyone - including you and me. We sin. Try to turn the other way from what God's Word says all you want, but there is no getting around the truth that we disobey God. We have evil thoughts. Our lips speak things we shouldn't. Our actions are not always good or kind or loving. So we are slaves. That is what Martin Luther realized, didn't he? He recognized this even apart from God's Word. He tried to save himself from this slavery but realized how it was hopeless. Luther gave His life to the church and became a monk, he deprived himself, beat himself, fasted and prayed. Yet, there was no peace. How could he ever satisfy a holy God? How could he ever be sure he had done enough to earn his forgiveness? He couldn't. He didn't. The path of work-righteousness can never bring true peace and certainty to the soul.

That is the saddest part about people straying from God's Word. That is why Jesus says, ***"If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples."*** For it is this Word of Christ that keeps pointing us to the eternal Word who is Christ. It is in this Word that we find the truth that is by grace alone. It is in this Word that we find the truth that it is by faith alone. It is in this Word where we find a totally different kind of righteousness - not from the law, but a righteousness that comes from God to which all of the Law and the Prophets testify. Jesus wants us to abide in His Word for these are the Scriptures that testify about Him. They tell you and me of His great love. God loved us so much He sent His Son. Jesus lived perfectly to set us free from the law. Jesus became sin in our place and suffered and bled and died on the cross to free us from the slavery and curse of sin and death and hell. Jesus rose from His grave and became our certainty that God loves and forgives us.

As Jesus says, ***"If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."*** That is the truth that finally set free a once disheartened and frustrated monk named Martin Luther. And Luther did not have to go on some great crusade or search under some rock or in some cave to find this truth. He found it right where Jesus says we will - in His Holy Word. In this Word we find truth - the truth that is Jesus our Savior. Jesus is our peace, our security, our certainty for life with God now on earth and forever in heaven. Jesus is the reason we

never have to worry about if we have done enough. Jesus is the “Amen” to all of God’s promises. And Jesus is always found right here - in God’s Word.

Doesn’t that make God’s Word pretty important, my friends? That makes God’s Word something to hold onto tightly (all of it), doesn’t it? That’s why it is more than just a bit shocking to hear someone call this Word something “*written by mortals long ago that doesn’t reflect what many Christians now believe.*” That’s not how my Savior describes Christians or disciples. May God in His grace keep us far away from such an attitude toward His precious, life-giving Word of truth. I pray we still heed these words of the doctor Martin Luther: “*Do not make articles of faith of your own thoughts..., lest your faith perchance turn out to be a dream. Stick to Scripture and God’s Word. There is the truth; there you will be safe; there are reliableness and faithfulness, completely, purely, sufficiently, and constantly.*” Or as Jesus puts it for us this morning: “***If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.***” May the Lord keep us steadfast to His Word. Amen.