

SERMON
 First Lutheran Church
 Aitkin, Minnesota
 October 29, 2017

Jeremiah 31:31-34
 Romans 3:19-28
 Rev. Darrell J. Pedersen

ADULT MESSAGE

Martin Luther, 500 years ago, stood up to the Pope, the Holy Roman Emperor, the cardinals, the bishops, the kings' armies and threats of torture and death. Luther discovered the most powerful and life-giving truth in the world. **God loves all people. Jesus came to bring God's love, forgiveness and new life to any and all who need it. We all need it. No one deserves God's love, but God wants everyone to receive and live in it.** And all the kings horses and all the kings men **could not prevent Luther** from telling the world about **Jesus!** (**Show video.**)

Jesus is with us here today. Do you believe that? Jesus with us – not as a judge, but as our loving Savior, best friend, helper and guide, as the One who loved you enough to **die on a cross for you and your forgiveness** and who came back from the dead **to claim you as a child of God.** On this **500th anniversary** of the **Reformation** Martin Luther started, we also celebrate that our confirmands believe **Jesus will be there for them, all of their lives and forever** –

- When you are taking the next test.
- When you are in your athletic event, concert or on your dates.
- When you decide whom to marry.
- When you think about having children.
- When you face tight money, sickness, or struggle in relationships.
- If you end up in the hospital, jail, prison, treatment, or divorce court.
- When your family supports you as you stand by your parent's casket.
- When you lie on your own deathbed.

Jesus loves you more even than your parents, or spouse, or children. Jesus is always seeking to bring about the **best good in your life.**

Lutheran Faith teaches–

- **Our life and salvation** is all about **faith/trust in God**
- **Faith is a gift** planted in our hearts by the Holy Spirit at our baptism.

- **Heaven** is in **God's hands**, promised to all of God's loved, precious and forgiven people – promised to you.
- **Earth and the neighbor** have been entrusted into **our hands**, to love and care for.
- Our life and salvation are **all about Jesus** – **2,000** years ago, as Jesus suffered and died at the hands of our world. **500** years ago when Martin Luther rediscovered God's love and grace. **125** years ago, when Swedish refugees settled in Aitkin County and scraped together a few dollars and a lot of sweat equity to build a house of worship. **15** years ago when most of you were baptized, and **today** at your confirmation.

Today we are thinking about your future as a precious, beloved child of God. We are also thinking about your parents' future as precious, beloved children of God. Also your grandparents and someday, Lord willing, your own children. Today, you will stand before us and say that you are **choosing to follow Jesus**, tomorrow, next week, next year and for the rest of your life. . . **God will delight** whenever **you and your family gather here for worship.**

Five hundred years ago, Luther and his friends were **trying to avoid the wrath of a hateful God.** Luther and all of his neighbors did everything they could to avoid God's judgment and an eternity spent in the fires of hell. They tried to be good enough to earn their way into heaven. **Then Luther read the Bible** for himself. In the words of scripture Luther **rediscovered that God loves, forgives, carries and blesses every single person** who is **willing to trust God with their lives.** Luther met the God who was **willing even to suffer and die** a wicked death at the hands of the very people he had come to save. Luther met a God who **demonstrated the greatest love** anyone could ever give for another. He **discovered that God's love** was for **him**, and for **you**, and for **your parents**, and for the most evil/sinful/hateful/hopeless/helpless person you have ever met. Luther discovered that Jesus came into this world, **not as our judge, but as our loving Savior.** Jesus came to **rescue us from lives lived apart from God's love.** **God's love – nobody deserves it, but God wants everyone to have it.**

The curse Luther and his friends lived under 500 years ago was that they were **terrified of God**. The curse we live under today is that we **forget God**. God **doesn't want to destroy you**. And God **won't forget you**. God loves you and **waits every day for you to love God back**.

Today is **about you realizing** that there is **no better way to live your life** than in the assurance of God's unfailing love for you. That there is **no better way to make your life decisions** than with God's faithful counsel and guidance. That there is **no better way to face the world** than with God in your heart. **No better way to find hope, meaning and joy than in the embrace of God**.

We are gathered together here in worship. **Worship** is **what we do** when we **realize** that **every good person**, every good thing in our life comes to us as **gift from our Creator God**. When we realize **how much God loves us**. . . Worship is **loving God back**. . .

- **"Want to"** vs. **"Have to"** – We go to church, **not in order to be saved, but because we are saved**.
- **Baptism** – We have been **adopted** into God's family, sisters or brothers of Jesus, precious children of God, Who promises **never to let us go**.
- **Scripture and Sermons** – Again and again, Jesus comes and **speaks to each of us personally**, giving us **hope and promise** to fill and carry us.
- **Holy Communion** – **Forgiveness, fresh start, power for living** – Jesus pours out his own precious Body and Blood so that we **don't have to fear God**, so that we **can love and trust God** with our whole lives.
- **Body of Christ** – We **rub shoulders** with everyday saints and sinners just like ourselves. We **lean on** one another. We **listen**. We **embrace**. We **carry** one another. We **pray together**.

Today, you are **not promising God** and this Body of Christ to be **"religious"** or to be **"good enough"** to be saved. No one is good enough. Today, God and this Body of Christ are **challenging you to rise up as Martin Luther did**:

- to **love and trust God** with your whole lives,
- to **turn to God** every day,
- to **worship God** here in this sanctuary, in your deer stand, at your athletic events, in your home, in the classroom, before the setting sun,

- to **reflect God's great love** by caring for the people & world around you,
- to **speak out** against lies and evil,
- to **work for justice and peace**. . .

Today, **Jesus is longing for you, and your parents, and all of us to walk hand in hand with him** all of our lives and forever. **What if we should slip** away from faith in Christ. **You may forget God**, but God won't forget you. **You may give up on God**, but God won't give up on you. **God's Holy Spirit will be whispering words of love to your heart** until the day you die.

One of your peers, **Alaina Chute**, experienced God at work in her life and world while on a **mission trip** to an **orphanage in Jamaica**. Watch this little clip of the video she made. (**Show Alaina Chute video**.) Did you hear Alaina say, "**God is amazing. God created this beautiful place, (Jamaica,) and God called me to serve there**." And Alaina's mom, Colleen said, "**I realized God has a great big plan to use me. Just as God has great plans to use all of us**." I invite everyone to step into the Fellowship Hall and see what our kids think God's mission for their lives is. God bless them in their lives and mission.

We **don't have to work our way to heaven**. **Jesus has already saved a place for us** there. That sets us free to **love and trust God** right here in this world. And to **love and care for our neighbor and the creation** until it is our turn for Jesus to bring us home to God's great banqueting table forever. **Confirmation is not graduation** from the church. Confirmation, **Affirmation of Baptism**, is eleven young adults **standing up with Martin Luther**, the **pioneer settlers** who started this church and the **whole Body of Christ** here in this place. **Together, we live and thrive in God's love**. Together we **stand and follow Jesus**. **God means to bless us all** dear sisters and brothers in Christ. Thanks be to God. Amen.