

Sunday, October 31, 2010
Reformation Day

Jeremiah 31:31–34
Psalm 46
Romans 3:19–28
John 8:31–36

I.N.I.

So if you were to plot a history of music in the church's worship, you would discover a pendulum swinging back and forth between the priests and the musicians. At some points, the priests would be vying for their control of ritual and texts and putting the brakes on the musicians. At other points, the musicians would be vying for their desire to add music here, elongate music there, make music in the service everywhere!

Today we're giving ourselves over to the musicians (Lars, choir, you win!). Today we are honoring the gift of music that Luther himself so loved. What did he say? "Next to theology, music deserves the highest praise."

For Luther, music was a gift of creation. Through song the gathered community offer honor and praise back to the Creator, and sings the Gospel. He said

Therefore accustom yourself to see in this creation your Creator and to praise [God] Him through it. If any would not sing and talk of what Christ has wrought for us, [they] he/she [show] shows thereby that he [they do] does not really believe..... Quoted in *Music in Lutheran Worship* by Carl Schalk (Church Music Pamphlet Series, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, © 1978), p 4

Lutherans singularly honor and mark the renewal of the church known as the Reformation today. In the wave of spirited worship, through the gift of music, that praises the Creator, that deserves the highest praise, which proclaims the Gospel in text and tune, the central activity to notice in our music-making is in congregational singing. It is in the assembly's voice.

If you would be so kind, no deadwood in the pews this morning. No one mutely standing by, please, today. Let us sing boldly. As Luther said

God has made our hearts and spirits happy through his dear Son....[Whoever] He who believes this sincerely and earnestly cannot help but be happy; [they] he must cheerfully sing.... Schalk, p 6.

And so we do. And so we shall.

When we sang *Ein Feste Burg ist Unser Gott*, "A Mighty Fortress is our God," we were proclaiming God's Word. We were wedding text and tune to Luther's paraphrase of today's

Psalm 46. The setting dances rhythmically with short notes set alongside long notes, syncopation weaving a memorable melody. Can you imagine the delight of the Germans who were previously subject mostly to Latin chants singing snippets of scripture in church?

This is a gift of the Reformation. This is how the re-formation of our own faith gets depth-charged, as we avail ourselves to the Means of Grace, which in Lutheran terms is the weekly worshipping assembly that frontloads God's Word and the Sacraments which at their best fetchingly and wonderfully prompt and sustain faith.

Dear Brother Martin was a troubled soul. He saw his own imperfections so clearly that he was perpetually in a funk. He woke up his confessor to pour out one more sin that he forgot to name, so troubled was he by the burden of a demanding and perfect God. It led Luther's confessor, Johann Staupitz to counsel young Luther by saying "God is not angry with you. You are angry with God."

God's Word was Luther's lifeline. As the gifted professor and pastor poured himself into theology, first teaching the Psalms, his assumptions about God's ways were altered. When reading St. Paul's premier letter to the Romans, he encountered what we heard today about the judgment under the law and the freedom in living by God's grace. Paul's description of law and the gospel became the root doctrine for reformation theology.

Our limitations, our sin, the world's tendency toward selfishness and hatred, the mess of nations mired in war, entire systems dedicated to the acquiring of wealth and goods at the expense of the created good and the exploitation of others, this is the law that in Reformation terms always judges us as unworthy, "captive to sin." How does St. Paul put it? "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

How do we get out of the hole that we have dug? How do we straighten out the crooked figure of our default tendency to put self first? Do we as Luther did, pray more fervently? Do we, as Luther did, become gymnasts of spiritual and ethical practices as if one more feat of devotion, one more fast to deprive ourselves of comfort, one more act of charity will add another rung to heaven? No! As Luther himself discovered, he had it all backwards. All this striving, all this working harder and harder did nothing except make himself feel even more worthless.

It was immersion into Scriptures, it was his own emptiness in knowing God that broke open the discovery of God already forgiving Martin, already making Martin worthy of love and acceptance *coram Deo*, before God that became the groundswell for his reforming work. In the 1500's, five hundred something years ago, a haggard and motivated Augustinian German monk read Romans 3 and read "A person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed from the law," and dear Brother Martin reported that in that moment in which the Word spoke to him the Gospel that it was as if the very gates of paradise were opened.

For Luther it became so important for people to know that Good News, that Gospel, to know that God was speaking a saving Word, to know that this Word in its clearest sound was in Jesus taking on God's judgment on the cross, that Luther and his colleagues in reform shouted *Sola*

Christus! Christ alone! *Sola Scriptura!* Scripture alone! *Sola Fides!* Faith alone! *Sola Gratia!* Grace alone! *Semper Reformanda!* Always reforming!

Drink up this day as a springboard to your own renewal of faith, to the renewal of the church's charge to united in Christ, to the eating up and drinking up of God's Word spoken, sung, and revealed in bread and wine.

How would Luther put it?

If [the soul] has the Word of God it is rich and lacks nothing since it is the Word of life, truth, light, peace, righteousness, salvation, joy, liberty, wisdom, power, grace, glory, and of every incalculable blessing... --quoted in Luther and the Hungry Poor: Gathered Fragments, by Samuel Torvend (Minneapolis: Fortress Press © 2008), p 67.

Or maybe we could sing it. Lars?

I.N.I.