

The Message of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century Is a Message to Our Time and People.

Text: 1 Chron 16:8-12

Suggested Hymns:

Tan: 195, 191, 793, 291, 266

Ade: 195, 851, 191, 793, 266

1) Unbending adherence to the Word of God

2) Loving loyalty to the Church

3) Our obligations to those who do not know that message

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is 1 Chronicles 16:8-12, ⁸ *Oh, give thanks to the LORD! Call upon His name; Make known His deeds among the peoples!* ⁹ *Sing to Him, sing psalms to Him; Talk of all His wondrous works!* ¹⁰ *Glory in His holy name; Let the hearts of those rejoice who seek the LORD!* ¹¹ *Seek the LORD and His strength; Seek His face evermore!* ¹² *Remember His marvelous works which He has done, His wonders, and the judgments of His mouth.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

When some important day occurs in the calendar of our individual life, such as the date of our birth, our Baptism or Confirmation, of our marriage, and the like, it is right and proper that we should observe it in fitting remembrance.

It is such days that have given a new and controlling influence to our thoughts and feelings. Such days have brought us into new and important relationships. They are mileposts, as it were, in life's journey.

And when their anniversary comes around, it is, as stated, proper to give a few moments to reflect on such events. Such conduct makes us more appreciative of the blessings possessed and more alive to our responsibilities.

Just as it is in the lifetime of an individual, so it is in the calendar of the Church. As certain days and dates present themselves in the calendar of the church year, it is fitting that we pause to reflect, and to consider what they mean.

Today, the 31st of October, is such a day. Therefore let us direct our attention to that day.

Pointing back to the year 1517, 493 years ago, the 31st of October informs us, as the text says, of “*marvelous works which [God] has done.*” Shutting ourselves out, in spirit, from our immediate surroundings and transferring ourselves back to the 16th century, to a little town in Saxony, Wittenberg, we see posted on the door of the Castle Church a paper placed there by one of the Augustinian friars of the town.

It is written in Latin. There is no special excitement, no particular public demonstration as these 95 theses are nailed to the door. Least of all did the author of the document, Brother Martin, think for a moment that his hammer blows would re-echo in all parts of the world.

Nobody thought that this act would make the name of Luther a household word in both hemispheres of the world and raise the last day of October, 1517, to the dignity of one of the truly great days in the life of the human race.

A historian (who is not a Lutheran) has said: “*Had there been no October 31, the European and American peoples would be thinking different, would be acting different, would be altogether different men and women from what they are at this moment.*”

And certainly if you compare the face of the globe today from what it was then, - if you stop to consider and trace what it was that produced this difference, - if you look at what advanced the cause of progress, brought hope to the religious world, deliverance to the social, intellectual, and political advancement of our race — if you trace these developments to their source, your research will lead you to that paper nailed to the Castle Church door of Wittenberg and to the cell of that man, Martin Luther.

Who knew what the result would be when Luther challenged John Tetzel and his infamous sale of indulgences.

Could you imagine someone gifted with prophecy stepping into that cloister cell and telling its occupant, Martin Luther that within four centuries there would be Lutheran Churches all over the world?

The Lutheran Church has seventy-three million men, women, and children, with many ministers, periodicals, papers, schools, colleges, and seminaries who are not ashamed to call themselves by his name. They cherish his teachings because they are based on Scripture alone. They lift up their hearts in gratitude and praise God for Luther's noble testimony — imagine someone telling Luther that all this would be the result of his Ninety-Five Theses.

You could imagine that this humble monk, whose words in the course of years shook the foundations of the Roman hierarchy, that if someone told him that all these things would happen would think the person strange and out of his mind.

Yet, are these things not so? And what has made them so? The man? No, not by birth or station or mere natural or mental qualifications, even though Luther was very gifted and was competent to grapple with the tyranny by which the Church and Europe for centuries had been enthralled.

No, it was not the man who wrought these marvellous things. What then? It was the message, yes, the message. Today we need to understand that the message of the reformation of the sixteenth century is also a message for our times and our people too. May the Lord bless our meditation on this Reformation Festival.

1. A Message Of Unbending Adherence To The Word Of God.

What was it, we naturally ask, that was so remarkable about these Ninety-Five Theses that Luther nailed against the door of the Castle Church? What caused the startling effect which they produced? In fourteen days they had spread over Germany. In a month they ran through all Christendom, even as far south as Jerusalem. One historian says it seemed as if the angels of God were engaged in spreading them. Why this effect?

The very first thesis of the 95 already offers an explanation when it opens: "*Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ says....*" Who says? "*Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ*"; not the Pope; not the Church Councils; not the Church.

You will note that there was an appeal here to a new standard, the teaching of the Bible, to the testimony and the authority of the Word of God as the only source in matters of soul and religion. The voices of the inspired Prophets and Apostles, that had for many centuries been suppressed, again resounded, and the

Bible, virtually unknown in large sections of the Church, was again restored to its rightful place.

And as it was with this first resounding note, it was throughout in every forward step of the reformatory movement. *Scripture alone*. In that most dramatic moment, when Luther stood, as it were, alone, except for the unseen presence of God, before the world and gave his ultimatum at the Diet of Worms, what was it? *“Unless I am convinced by clear and indisputable proofs from the Scripture, I neither can nor will retract anything. Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me. Amen.”*

The same man, in the Wartburg Castle, when in its silence and seclusion he had an opportunity to forge the weapons of his warfare, what was he doing? Making, as he expressed it, the *“apostles and evangelists speak German.”* Luther knew full well that when the tradesman in his workshop, the traveller at the inn, the peasant behind his plough, the servant in the home could read the will of their Maker and Redeemer in their own language and quote Bible proofs, that then they had in their hands the weapon to put down the forces of evil and oppression which was dealt out by a grasping and deceitful priesthood.

And this was so throughout his whole life. *Scripture alone*. At the gripping Disputation at Leipzig, at the Marburg Colloquy, in the Augsburg Confession, which is the basic Confession of our Church, in his every sermon, in his Catechisms, devotional writings, theological treatises, lectures to students, which numbered thousands upon thousands, and in his correspondence, constantly there is this appeal to the Scriptures. That is the one outstanding feature of the Reformation of the sixteenth century, the message that it also speaks to the 21st century.

There has never been a better time when the people of our country have had the opportunity to know the Christian religion as now. Many Bibles are distributed to children in High School and people in prisons. Bibles can be easily purchased at many shops.

However, there has never been a time when people have had as little true religion as they have today. Our country has many churches. There are churches in nearly every town. Our newspapers include church advertising and news. There are magazines which are publishing many religious editorials,

articles, and stories. The market is flooded with religious books of all kinds. All this is bringing religion in an increased measure to the attention of the general public.

But on the other hand, it is sadly true that an unusually large percentage of the religion which is preached and taught and published today is cunningly deceptive and utterly false. Some of the largest and most influential church denominations are no longer stressing their distinctive doctrines and a religion of positive conviction.

Even in so-called Christian denominations there are some men who deny all the fundamental doctrines of the Christian religion and yet are permitted to teach in theological seminaries and to preach from so-called Christian pulpits.

As a result, our country today is less Christian than it ever has been before, and, of course, less morally sound. This produces increasingly bad results in the home, the church, and the state. That is the religious situation of our otherwise glorious country.

The souls of people cannot live on such things. In this age of the unsettling of creeds, of abandonment of time-honoured convictions, in this age of sensationalism, of writers and preachers which have no messages except those of political and sociological intent, the old Church of the Reformation stands where she has always stood, seeking no revision of her creeds, troubled by no heresy trials, giving no place in her pulpits and publications and classrooms to those who do not accept the foundation principle of "*The Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible.*"

May she always, as in times past and present, hold true to that principle, hold to the end of days this Reformation message! Then she is true to her heaven-born assignment and alive to the mission God entrusted to her hands nearly 500 years ago. She has a distinct duty in the midst of this sin-cursed, Satan-enslaved, sorrowing world of ours, namely, to hold forth the Word of Life and Salvation.

Let the firm conviction and sincere resolve of each and every member of her communion be, *The Word shall stand despite all foes.*¹ Against any opinion that dares to lay impious hands on the Bible which Luther found in the University at Erfurt, we, as children of the Reformation, protest and close our doors. Sola

Scriptura — the Scriptures alone! That is the first part of the Reformation message.

2. A Message Of Loving Loyalty To The Church That Bears The Name Of The Reformation.

One thing that deeply impresses you, as you review the events of 493 years ago, is the interest shown in respect to matters of religion. People read the words of Luther, flocked to him to hear his sermons, teachings and disputations, and talked of the questions at issue. It became the great, all-absorbing topic and concern of their thoughts. More than that, knights were ready to unsheathe their swords for the cause. Followers of the rising faith were willing to suffer confiscation of their goods, persecution, and even death. Genuine, whole-hearted devotion marked the spread of the Reformation.

Remember the words of the old Margrave of Brandenburg, *“Rather than allow the Word of God to be taken from me, rather than deny my God, I would kneel down before Your Majesty and have my head cut off!”* The emperor was so surprised by this steadfastness that he hastily cried out in his bad German, *“Dear Prince, not the head off, not the head off!”*

And the Elector of Saxony, when for political reasons Melancthon wanted to restrain him from signing the Augsburg Confession, exclaimed, *“God forbid that you should exclude me. I am resolved to do what is right, without troubling myself about my crown. I desire to confess my Lord. My electoral hat and my ermine are not so precious to me as the cross of Jesus Christ. I shall leave on earth these marks of my greatness, but my Master’s cross will accompany me to heaven.”*

By now you should be able to see that this intensity of interest, this placing of Christ, His cause and His cross first, this devotedness above all things to religion, is the chief need of our day. That is the message that comes to us from the Reformation.

The time in which we are living is a time of spiritual indifferentism and of a “go-as-you-please” Christianity. The devil is always on the attack. The devil tried to crush the Church by bitter and blood-stained persecutions. He failed. *“The blood of the martyrs was the seed of the Church.”*

Then the devil tried to crush the Church by taking God's Book from the people. He failed. God, through Luther, gave the Bible back to the people. Now the devil is making another attempt, perhaps his last attempt before the end of the world. He has changed his tactics. He is making people believe it does not matter whether you believe or not, or even what you believe.

He is trying to make people believe that as far as churches are concerned, one is just as good as another. They all have the same goal in view. And then again, why belong to any church? You can be just as good without it, perhaps better than many people who go to church.

Therefore, how many people, or rather how few people, are there today with whom religion is uppermost and their supreme concern? For how many people is it the governing and all-controlling element and principle of their lives? And who, if called upon, would like these men of the sixteenth century be willing to suffer the loss of goods and life, rather than to surrender their convictions, and give up their Church? Remember that it is unfaltering devotion to Christ which makes the Church efficient.

Ours is a glorious history. Do not let the spirit of complacency and of carelessness cause you to be unworthy of it. We all know that people's frowns, mocking smiles, and sneers often depresses the soul in those people who are striving to live in a godly manner in Christ in our time.

May the loyalty that comes from a deep-rooted faith in the living God and in His everlasting Word be ours. May God give us a fearless faith filled with the action of the times which we are commemorating today. How those people stood up for the truth of God's Word ought to be an inspiration to us all. May an intensity of interest be ours, a wholehearted devotion as the sons and daughters of that memorable beginning of the Lutheran Church.

3. A Message Of Our Obligations To Those Who Do Not Know That Message

Finally, we note that there is in this message of the Reformation to our times a call to action.

There is in store a great opportunity and future for our Church. Whether in respect to her Scriptural doctrines, her achievements in the various spheres of practical Christianity, or in the personal lives of those who are her members, the

Lutheran Church presents a history which, as we look at it today, should inspire her sons and daughters to make history.

There are many unchurched in our land, and she is far from being the power that she ought to be. God, without any merit or worthiness on our part, has entrusted His Word, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, in all its truth and purity to us. We dare not keep the truth for ourselves. We owe it to our God and Saviour, and we owe it to our fellow sinners to let them know the Law and Gospel of Christ.

We have wonderful opportunities. The language barrier has been broken down more and more. God has showered upon our people material blessings so that we can support those organisations that spread the Word of God.

Finally, let us remember that the Word of God is a sacred trust. As we dispense it, we increasingly keep it. There can be no louder call to us than this, "*Hand it on!*" that others, too, may share the wonderful blessings.

More love for God's kingdom, more zeal, more self-sacrifice. To this end, may God look down with favour upon our observance of Reformation Day, and then we shall be truly thankful for the marvellous work which God has done. To God be the glory, great things He has done. Let us thank God for our heritage. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Hymn 195 v 3