

REFORMATION SUNDAY

OCTOBER 25, 2020

ST. PAUL'S LUTHERAN CHURCH, FALLS CHURCH, VA

SERVICE OF WORD AND PRAYER



PRELUDE *By Grace I'm Saved* Setting: Dennis W. Zimmer

WELCOME

ENTRANCE HYMN #566 *By Grace I'm Saved*

- 1 **By grace I'm saved, grace free and boundless;
My soul, believe and doubt it not.
Why stagger at this word of promise?
Has Scripture ever falsehood taught?
No! Then this word must true remain:
By grace you too will life obtain.**

- 2 **By grace! None dare lay claim to merit;
Our works and conduct have no worth.
God in His love sent our Redeemer,
Christ Jesus, to this sinful earth;
His death did for our sins atone,
And we are saved by grace alone.**

- 3 **By grace God's Son, our only Savior,
Came down to earth to bear our sin.
Was it because of your own merit
That Jesus died your soul to win?
No, it was grace, and grace alone,
That brought Him from His heav'nly throne.**

- 4 **By grace! This ground of faith is certain;
As long as God is true, it stands.
What saints have penned by inspiration,
What in His Word our God commands,
Our faith in what our God has done
Depends on grace—grace through His Son.**

- 5 **By grace to timid hearts that tremble,
In tribulation's furnace tried,
By grace, in spite of fear and trouble,
The Father's heart is open wide.
Where could I help and strength secure
If grace were not my anchor sure?**

6 **By grace! On this I'll rest when dying;
 In Jesus' promise I rejoice;
 For though I know my heart's condition,
 I also know my Savior's voice.
 My heart is glad, all grief has flown
 Since I am saved by grace alone.**

CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

In the name of the Father, and of the ☩ Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Beloved in the Lord! Let us draw near with a true heart and confess our sins unto God our Father, beseeching Him in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to grant us forgiveness.

Our help is in the name of the Lord,
who made heaven and earth.

I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord,
and You forgave the iniquity of my sin.

(Silence for reflection and self-examination)

O almighty God, merciful Father,

I, a poor, miserable sinner, confess unto You all my sins and iniquities with which I have ever offended You and justly deserved Your temporal and eternal punishment. But I am heartily sorry for them and sincerely repent of them, and I pray You of Your boundless mercy and for the sake of the holy, innocent, bitter sufferings and death of Your beloved Son, Jesus Christ, to be gracious and merciful to me, a poor, sinful being.

In the mercy of almighty God, Jesus Christ was given to die for us, and for His sake God forgives us all our sins. To those who believe in Jesus Christ He gives the power to become the children of God and bestows on them the Holy Spirit. May the Lord, who has begun this good work in us, bring it to completion in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

KYRIE # 942 Kyrie! God, Father

Ky-ri - e! God, Fa - ther in heav'n a - bove, You a - bound in gra - cious love,

Of all things the mak - er and pre - serv - er. E - le - i - son! E - le - i - son!

Ky - ri - e! O Christ, our king, Sal - va - tion for all You came to bring.

O Lord Je - sus, God's own Son, Our me - di - a - tor at the heav'n - ly throne:

Hear our cry and grant our sup-pli-ca - tion. E - le - i - son! E - le - i - son!

Ky - ri - e! O God the Ho - ly Ghost, Guard our faith, the

gift we need the most, And bless our life's last hour, That we leave this

sin - ful world with glad - ness. E - le - i - son! E - le - i - son!

GLORIA IN EXCELSIS #948 All Glory Be to God Alone

1 All glo - ry be to God a - lone, For - ev - er - more the
 2 We praise You, God; Your name we bless And wor - ship You in
 3 Lord God, our King on heav - en's throne, Our Fa - ther, the Al -
 4 You take the whole world's sin a - way; Have mer - cy on us,
 5 You on - ly are the Ho - ly One And o - ver all are

high - est one, Who did our sin - ful race be - friend And
 hum - ble - ness; From day to day we glo - ri - fy The
 might - y One. O Lord, the sole - be - got - ten One, Lord
 Lord, we pray. You take the whole world's sin a - way; O
 Lord a - lone. O Je - sus Christ, we glo - ri - fy You

grace and peace to us ex - tend. A - mong us may His
 ev - er - last - ing God on high. Of Your great glo - ry
 Je - sus Christ, the Fa - ther's Son, True God from all e -
 Lord, re - ceive our prayer this day. From God's right hand Your
 and the Spir - it, Lord Most High; With Him You ev - er -

gra - cious will All hearts with deep thanks - giv - ing fill.
 do we sing, And to Your throne our thanks we bring.
 ter - ni - ty, O Lamb of God, to You we flee.
 mer - cy send, To all the world Your grace ex - tend.
 more shall be One in the Fa - ther's maj - es - ty.

THE PRAYER OF THE DAY

The Lord be with you.
And also with you.

Let us pray. Almighty and gracious Lord,

pour out Your Holy Spirit on Your faithful people. Keep us steadfast in Your grace and truth, protect and deliver us in times of temptation, defend us against all enemies, and grant to Your Church Your saving peace; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.



FIRST LESSON Revelation 14:6–7

Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people. And he said with a loud voice, “Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come, and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water.”

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM 46

God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way,
though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea,
though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains tremble at its swelling.
There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy habitation of the Most High.
God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved;
God will help her when morning dawns.
The nations rage, the kingdoms totter;
he utters his voice, the earth melts.
The LORD of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress.
Come, behold the works of the LORD,
how he has brought desolations on the earth.
He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;
he breaks the bow and shatters the spear;
he burns the chariots with fire.
“Be still, and know that I am God.
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth!”
The LORD of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress.

**Glory be to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning,
is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

SECOND LESSON Romans 3:19–28

Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: 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, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

CHILDREN’S SERMON

ALLELUIA VERSE

Alleluia. Alleluia. Alleluia.

GOSPEL Matthew 11:12–19

The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew, the 11th chapter.

Glory to You, O Lord.

[Jesus said:] “From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John, and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

“But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their playmates,

“‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance;
we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.’

For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon.’ The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds.”

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to You, O Christ

SERMON

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus, amen.
Dear friends in Christ:

For Reformation Sunday, our church gives us the choice of two possible Gospel readings. We can read from John 8 – words from Jesus which explain the freedom we have as his people – or we can read the lesson just read from Matthew. I decided that this year we would read from Matthew, since the rest of our Sunday readings have been from that Gospel as well.

At first glance, it may seem that the lesson from Matthew offers fewer connection points with the themes of the great Reformation. After all, the Reformation was all about freedom—freedom from the belief that we are saved by our own works and freedom from a church that imposed too many restrictions. And yet, historically, the reading which has seen more frequent use by Lutherans on this day has been the text from Matthew.

What is it, then, about this text that speaks to us on this day?

At the beginning of the text we hear Jesus teaching about John the Baptist. Luther and the Reformers strongly identified with the person and role of John. In the Smalcald Articles – part of our Lutheran Confessions – John is referred to as “the fiery angel St. John, the preacher of true repentance.” John is called an angel because he has traditionally been identified with the angel of Revelation 10:1, who announces that there would be “no more delay... the mystery of God would be fulfilled.”

The Lutheran reformers saw in John’s call to preach a parallel to their own calling. They, too, were like a voice in the wilderness calling the people to change.

The change involved true repentance. This was a repentance of the heart and was demanded of all – pope, bishop and monk included.

Even more, the call to change involved a clear pointing to Christ as the one through whom salvation comes. The Reformers believed that a clear proclamation of Christ by the church was missing in their day. They believed this because of certain policies of the church – such as the rule that worship must be in Latin, which few people spoke. And they believed this because of certain doctrines – most especially the teaching that forgiveness must be earned, either through holiness of life or through the purchase of indulgences.

Luther and the Reformers felt other connections with John as well. Jesus had earlier said to the people about John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings’ houses.” The Reformers were not the high and mighty of their day. They were not the rich. They stood firm in their doctrine instead of conforming to the world. And they watched their money go off to Rome – where people in soft clothing were living in king’s houses.

Furthermore, as in John’s day, violent forces were arrayed against those who clearly proclaimed Christ. In John’s day it was Herod and his followers, who put John in prison. In Luther’s day it was the church at Rome, who excommunicated him and sought to take his life. “The kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force,” said Jesus. Both John and Luther knew this well.

We see, then, that these numerous parallels between John and the Reformers make this text a good one for a remembrance of the Reformation. And the text traditionally ended with these verses which we’ve so far considered.

But in recent years we have also continued reading the next verses of the chapter. Here Jesus pivots from speaking about John to speaking about the times. “But to what shall I compare this generation?” he asks. And to his question he gives some answers.

By adding these verses, the church seeks to move us from making this day a simple rehearsal of that which took place in the Reformation to a day when we can think about the witness we give to our generation.

When Jesus described his generation, he said they were “like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their playmates, ‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.’” Here Jesus describes a people who are self-absorbed to the point that they expect everyone to react to them. They are like children – obsessed with themselves and not yet understanding the great things that are taking place around them.

Does this remind you of our generation? It reminds me.

Ours is the age of the selfie and the social media post and the personal blog. We put out our pictures, our ideas and our opinions and we anxiously await the reaction. When no one dances to our flute-playing or mourns to our dirge, we get quite upset... perhaps even traumatized or outraged. We live for other people’s approval and die when we feel neglected.

And in our self-absorption, we miss what God is doing in our lives. God is calling us to a higher purpose. He is calling us to work in the Kingdom around us – where he is at work, changing lives and extending his healing. He is calling us to repentance and faith. He is forgiving our sins and empowering us to forgive others.

Jesus went on to say: “For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon.’ The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’” This description was expertly set up by the children’s song. Flute-playing is the joy which the Son of Man brings. Dirge-singing is the discipline which John exhibited. Very clever!

But more than being clever, these words are meant to again describe Jesus’ generation. Jesus’ age was a critical and cynical one. It was quick with the negative labels. It loved to put things in the worst light. And it found fault in everyone.

John didn’t indulge in fine food. He abstained from strong drink and did not wear soft clothing. That was his style. Those were his choices. He no doubt lived this way to catch the attention of the people and reinforce the urgency of his message.

Jesus’ style was different. He reclined at table with both the well-regarded and the outcasts, and both the rich and the poor. He attended wedding banquets and Passover celebrations. He accepted the extravagant anointing by the sinful woman, but also had no home in which to lay down his head. Those were his choices. He lived this way in order to interact with people from all walks of life and reinforce that his message is for all.

Despite these differences, John and Jesus had the same message. They both preached a message of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

And yet, the people decided to slap labels on them – no doubt to justify their rejection. “John must have a demon. He won’t eat or drink. How strange. Jesus must be a glutton and a drunkard. Look who he hangs out with. How wrong.”

Is our age any better? Certainly not. You know how it goes. If you're rich you must be a thief. If you're poor you must be lazy. If you're this color you must act this way. If you're from that country you must act that way. If you vote for this person you must be dumb. If you vote for that person you must be dumb too. If you've made a mistake you must be careless. If you have a different opinion you must be ignorant. The list could go on and on.

Ours is a highly critical and highly cynical age. And perhaps that is what the church in our day should be addressing.

The church in Luther's day addressed the need for the Gospel to be understood as a gift, so that people wouldn't think they needed to earn their salvation. Luther and the Reformers keyed in on passages such as our second lesson today, from Romans 3: "For there is no distinction: 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."

That understanding of the Gospel will continue to be needed in our world too. But perhaps not as critically. Much of humanity today doesn't seem to worry about earning salvation. They're not convinced that they even need to be saved.

As Christ-followers today, we are to witness to our age by showing that there is a better way, a better understanding, a message of hope. We are to live authentically, speak authentically and promote peace between people and not anger.

In an age which always finds fault, we point to the mercy and forgiveness of Christ. In an age which believes no one is good, we point to Jesus as the fount and source of all goodness.

We lift high the cross of Christ as a sign of God's love for all people. And we bear our crosses as those who suffer with Christ and yet are sure of his promised salvation.

Jesus concludes his assessment of the times by saying: "yet wisdom is justified by her deeds." The way of Jesus will ultimately be seen as wise because of the good deeds it produces. And these deeds will be the healing and the forgiving and the peacemaking that Jesus himself exhibited in his time on earth and still does through the efforts of his people. This whole episode in chapter 11 was prompted because John, who was in prison, heard "about the deeds of the Christ (v.2)."

We are grateful for all these deeds that help sustain us from day to day. We are grateful for the deeds of others and grateful for the opportunity to do good deeds to others in return.

But above all, we are grateful for the greatest of all deeds—the one done by Christ when he went to the cross. This was the deed that only he could accomplish. This was the deed that we needed most of all.

Wisdom is justified by her deeds, yes. And our deeds are not always so good. But thankfully, we are justified by the deed of Christ. Christ's deed of offering himself was the sacrifice that earned our forgiveness. Through his sacrifice we are saved from our sin.

Knowing of that salvation, and how it is accomplished through our justification by Christ, let us go forward in peace and joy as Christ's witnesses in our age, doing the good works he has prepared us to do. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

- 1 **Built on the Rock the Church shall stand
Even when steeples are falling.
Crumbled have spires in ev'ry land;
Bells still are chiming and calling,
Calling the young and old to rest,
But above all the souls distressed,
Longing for rest everlasting.**

- 2 **Surely in temples made with hands
God, the Most High, is not dwelling;
High above earth His temple stands,
All earthly temples excelling.
Yet He who dwells in heav'n above
Chooses to live with us in love,
Making our bodies His temple.**

- 3 **We are God's house of living stones,
Built for His own habitation.
He through baptismal grace us owns
Heirs of His wondrous salvation.
Were we but two His name to tell,
Yet He would deign with us to dwell
With all His grace and His favor.**

- 4 **Here stands the font before our eyes,
Telling how God has received us.
The altar recalls Christ's sacrifice
And what His Supper here gives us.
Here sound the Scriptures that proclaim
Christ yesterday, today, the same,
And evermore, our Redeemer.**

- 5 **Grant, then, O God, Your will be done,
That, when the church bells are ringing,
Many in saving faith may come
Where Christ His message is bringing:
"I know My own; My own know Me.
You, not the world, My face shall see.
My peace I leave with you. Amen."**

NICENE CREED

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father. Through Him all things were made. For us and for our salvation He came down from heaven; by the power of the Holy Spirit He became incarnate from the virgin Mary, and was made man. For our sake He was crucified under Pontius Pilate; He suffered death and was buried. On the third day He rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and His kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son. With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified. He has spoken through the prophets. We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

OFFERING *Built on the Rock* Setting: Scott M. Hyslop

PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH

Having confidence in our justification by grace through faith and having access to the Father in Jesus' name, let us turn our hearts in prayer on behalf of ourselves, the Church and all people according to their needs.

Brief silence

O almighty God, You have shown Your faithfulness by raising up those in every generation who call Your Church to repentance and renewal. Continue to raise up voices in our own day who herald the truth of Your Word and proclaim the faith in purity and truth against all enemies. Lord, in Your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Everlasting Father, You do not desire the death of the sinner but want all to come to faith and life in Christ. Guide your church in its outreach to the community, that your message may go forth in word and deed, and that many may hear and believe. Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Merciful Lord, Your Word has been the light and salvation throughout the ages. Help us to bring Your grace to those in darkness, and grant them freedom through the forgiveness of their sins. Bless the missionaries serving far and near and the new congregations they establish in Your name. Lord, in Your mercy,
hear our prayer.

God of power and might, You have established governments and the order of law for the protection of all people and to preserve the freedom to worship You in spirit and in truth. Grant to Donald, our president; Ralph, our governor; the Congress of these United States; and the legislature of our state wisdom, humility and integrity, that all may enjoy true justice and the protection of life from its conception to its natural end. Lord, in Your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Holy and gracious God, Your power is revealed chiefly in showing mercy to those in need. Give to the sick healing, to the troubled peace, to the grieving comfort and to the dying peace. Hear us first on

behalf of _____ and those we name in our hearts before You. According to Your gracious promise, grant patience to those in tribulation and trial. Lord, in Your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Heavenly Father, You have given great gifts to Your people and provided resources to provide for their own needs and for the poor. Bless the agencies and programs of Your Church by which Your people give aid and support to those in need. Help us to provide gainful employment to all people, that they may enjoy the fruits of their labors and honor You with the works of their hands. Lord, in Your mercy,
hear our prayer.

O faithful Lord, throughout the ages You spoke hope through the prophets until that day when You delivered up Your own Son to be our Savior and Redeemer. Bless those who are just learning the Gospel, and bless us with the desire to know and keep Your Word. Encourage Your people to avail themselves of the grace of confession and absolution so that they may forgive one another and live in the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. Lord, in Your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Almighty God and Father, we pray You to grant us all good things that will benefit us in body and soul and to prevent anything harmful to us or to our salvation. Teach us to live in contentment with Your will and purpose and in the freedom You alone supply to serve You with all our heart, mind, body and soul; all these things we pray in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

**Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name,
Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done on earth
as it is in heaven;
give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom
and the power and the glory
forever and ever. Amen.**

BENEDICTION

The Lord bless us and keep us.
The Lord make His face shine on us
and be gracious to us.
The Lord look upon us with favor and ✠ give us peace.

- 1 **A mighty fortress is our God,
A trusty shield and weapon;
He helps us free from ev'ry need
That hath us now o'ertaken.
The old evil foe
Now means deadly woe;
Deep guile and great might
Are his dread arms in fight;
On earth is not his equal.**

- 2 **With might of ours can naught be done,
Soon were our loss effected;
But for us fights the valiant One,
Whom God Himself elected.
Ask ye, Who is this?
Jesus Christ it is,
Of Sabaoth Lord,
And there's none other God;
He holds the field forever.**

- 3 **Though devils all the world should fill,
All eager to devour us,
We tremble not, we fear no ill;
They shall not overpow'r us.
This world's prince may still
Scowl fierce as he will,
He can harm us none.
He's judged; the deed is done;
One little word can fell him.**

- 4 **The Word they still shall let remain
Nor any thanks have for it;
He's by our side upon the plain
With His good gifts and Spirit.
And take they our life,
Goods, fame, child, and wife,
Though these all be gone,
Our vict'ry has been won;
The Kingdom ours remaineth.**

ANNOUNCEMENTS

DISMISSAL

Go in peace. Serve the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

POSTLUDE *A Mighty Fortress* Setting: Kevin Hildebrand

Altar Flowers: "Thank God for the many blessing he has given us." By Ian and Kristen C.

Acknowledgments

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