

Reformation Day 2018.

Matthew 11:12-19

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 for this Sunday is written in the book of St Matthew 11:12-19 which was our Gospel reading before.

12 From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has been advancing with triumphant force and violent men are laying hold of it. 13 For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. 14 If you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come. 15 Let the one who has ears hear!

16 "To what shall I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling out to others: 17 'We have played the flute for you, and yet you have not been dancing. We have sung a funeral song, and yet you have not been mourning.' 18 For, when John came, he was neither eating nor drinking, and people used to say, 'He has a demon.' 19 When the Son of Man came, He was eating and drinking, and people are saying, 'Look at the glutton and drunkard, a friend of tax-collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is proved right by her actions."

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

Dear friends in Christ:

Peace be with you.

The grace, mercy, and peace of Christ Jesus rest upon each and every one of you this day.

One of the most common statements repeated concerning the Reformation is that "the Gospel was discovered and set free." Five hundred years ago, and still even today all the Protestants are pulling out all the stops to celebrate this freedom of the Gospel. And yet, how well do we know our Scripture? Five hundred years later, is there a chance that we may have slid back into the ignorant, Biblically-illiterate realities that our Reformation forefathers were fighting against and willing to die for?

Consider the words of our Gospel lesson for today. Now, I know that some of you are already tuning out. Why? Because you already know this. It's all so simple and easy, right? Jesus makes clear that John the Baptist was the new Elijah, who was sent to proclaim and prepare the coming of Christ, and people didn't want to believe it. The children in the marketplace who were calling out to their playmates? Duh! Those are the faithful ones, calling out to the people to repent and mourn their sin, and to turn and hold fast to Christ and rejoice in their justification; their freedom. But all those rotten playmates refused to listen. They refused to dance with joy. They refused to mourn and grieve their sin. But in the end faithful Wisdom [God's holy Wisdom in the flesh, Jesus Christ, and also all of us who have been made faithfully wise in Christ] will be justified in our actions. In the end, the faithful will win out and come out on top. Sound about right? The Gospel lesson in a nutshell (as you see it)?

What if I told you that this isn't at all what this text says? What if I told you that you, in your "wisdom," couldn't be more wrong? How can I say such a thing? Easy. Let the text do the talking. Like Luther did so many centuries ago, let's go back and see what the original text has to say. We'll begin with the discussion of the children in the marketplace, who were calling out to their playmates. Who are these children who call out to their stubborn little playmates? If you simply let the text speak to us (and don't read into it what we want it to say) we quickly "discover" that Jesus is comparing these children in the marketplace who call out to "this generation." **"To what shall I compare this generation? [this generation] They are like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling out to others:."** Based upon the context, structure, and grammar of the text, it's clear that Jesus isn't referring to faithful prophets like John or the apostles or even Himself when He speaks of these children who call out in the marketplace. **"This generation"** is referring to those who refuse to hear John the Baptist's call to **"repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand."** **"This generation"** is referring to those who refuse to listen to Jesus as He proclaims and makes known the gracious and merciful reign and rule of almighty God in their midst.

"This generation" is actually referring to the wicked people who refuse to listen or go along with anything that doesn't match up with their wants, their wills, or their expectations. **"This generation"** are the

wicked people Jesus compares to the children whining in the marketplace. Yes, I said "whining." Again, the original Greek text paints this very vivid picture of kids sitting down in the middle of the marketplace (like Kmart) and throwing a temper-tantrum, whining at their friends because their friends aren't doing exactly what they want them to do.

These flute-playing children are the ones whining and complaining and throwing a temper-tantrum that John the Baptist doesn't match their preconceived notions and desires regarding who/what the "new Elijah" was to look like and sound like. They expected the "new Elijah" to come with festal, parade-like shouts of joy (flute-playing and dancing). "Hear ye, hear ye! Here comes the Messiah! Let's get this party started!" But John didn't do that so clearly in "their expectations" he's not the new Elijah. This is why they say, "We played the flute for you [John], but you didn't dance!" John didn't dance and party and pour sweet honey into their ears, telling them what they wanted to hear. He was all business. He was on a mission. The same goes for the faithful ones who heard and listened to John. They didn't dance either. The faithful ones listened to the Word, and they repented and mourned their sin. They believed God's Truth of the Law, even if it was coming from a crazy looking guy who wore camel hair clothing and ate locusts and wild honey. The faithful ones didn't trust their eyes, but trusted their ears. They listened and turned from their wicked ways. They repented and were baptized.

On the other side, these dirge-singing children Jesus speaks of are the ones whining and complaining and throwing a tantrum because Jesus didn't match their ideas on what their version of the Messiah was supposed to look like and sound like. "When the Messiah comes, He's supposed to strike down all wickedness and evil. And yet here's this Jesus eating and drinking and feasting and hanging out with the very people the Messiah is supposed to destroy, tax collectors and prostitutes and 'sinners'! This Jesus CLEARLY isn't our promised Messiah. Just look at Him!"

"Wisdom is justified by her deeds!" What does this mean? This doesn't mean that the good guys wind up winning in the end, justified by God because of what they did. That's what we want to hear, but that's not at all what Jesus is saying! In fact, it's just the opposite. You can almost hear the exasperation in Jesus' voice as He speaks these words to the people. He's dumbfounded. He can't believe how willfully ignorant and stubborn "**this generation**" is being. This same stubborn and wicked generation, who refused to listen to or acknowledge the words and works of almighty God being done through John the Baptist and Jesus Christ. God in the flesh, are the same ones who dare to look to God (the very epitome and personification of Wisdom) and arrogantly declare God innocent. I'll say it again. This wicked generation justifies God and declares Him innocent. Why? "Well clearly God wouldn't send crazy John the Baptist as the new Elijah. Clearly God wouldn't send Jesus, the son of the carpenter and guy who regularly hangs out with the riff-raff and dregs of society, to be the almighty Messiah who crushes such wicked sin. No our wise and almighty God is innocent of having anything to do with these two frauds. My God would NEVER do anything like that, so He's off the hook. I won't blame God for these two losers making my life uncomfortable. It's not God's fault. It's the devil's fault!"

The way the original Greek reads here is, "Wisdom is declared innocent of her own works!" Jesus is expressing exasperation. Jesus is dumbfounded. He can't believe the foolishness He's witnessing. What Jesus is making clear with these words is that God CLEARLY is at work through the works and words of John the Baptist and Jesus the Christ, and yet these whining, petulant yahoos refuse to see it, listen to it, they don't even enter a thought that they might be wrong. The thought never even crosses their minds. Instead, they put themselves in the place of God and declare Him innocent of such foolishness, in spite of the fact that God is doing EXACTLY what He said He was going to do all along.

Kind of puts a very different understanding on this text, doesn't it? And you thought you already had it figured out! But here's the question we need to wrestle with today: What does this have to do with us? What does this have to do with us and our generation as we celebrate the Reformation today? Friends has anything changed? In five hundred years, has anything changed? In the almost two thousand years since Jesus first spoke these words, has anything really changed? NO I don't think so! We are living in "**this generation**"! "**This generation**" that Jesus speaks of is OUR generation too! What's truly sad is that many a Christian, the very same folks who celebrate over 500 years of Reformation and the "revolutionary" splitting away from evil Rome, are the very marketplace whiners that Jesus is talking about.

Just think about all this in terms of Word and Sacrament ministry, the very means that God Himself appoints and uses in order to make disciples, to call to repentance, and to bestow His grace and mercy upon His children. How many people "self-proclaimed Christians" don't like all that stuffy, old-fashioned, lame "Churchy" stuff! The "Word and Sacrament? 'Poor, miserable sinner'? Play the flute, not the dirge! No one likes that dirgy stuff. It's not cool. It's not fun. It's so out-of-date. It doesn't make me feel happy-clappy and warm and fuzzy. This isn't how God intended to make disciples in our day and age!" And Wisdom continues to be arrogantly and foolishly declared innocent, in spite of the mighty works He continues to do through His means of grace; His Word and His Sacraments.

My dear friends: "This Word and Sacrament" is how God chooses to work. There is nothing new under the sun. Faith alone in God's Word and Promise alone; the Word that bespeaks us dead in our sin and alive in His promise; the Gospel promise that was made flesh and hung on a cross to die. Faith alone in God's grace alone, which He bestows upon us because of Christ alone. This is it. This is how it's ALWAYS been done! This [the crucifix] is how God works salvation. "No one comes to the Father except through Me." St. Paul gets this. He's very clear. **"We preach Christ crucified; a stumbling block to the Jews and folly to the Gentiles."** Christ crucified; that's it. Paul got it. Luther got it. The faithful today get it. What about you? It isn't broke. Don't fix it!

Why was Christ crucified? Answer: For us and our sin! Christ lived and died for us. He paid for all our sin because we can't pay for even a single one, no matter how good and awesome we think we are. God had to die for us! "Why was Christ crucified? Because God loves us. God loves us so much that He sent His own Son to take our place and be our substitute. Jesus God in the flesh loves us so much that He willingly offered Himself up as a propitiation, a sacrifice intended to restore peace and favour. Jesus willingly made Himself the propitiation for us because there is NOTHING we can do to make propitiation for ourselves..

That's Gospel! That's reason to rejoice and celebrate! Our God and Lord feasts with us today. **"The Lord of hosts is with us!"** That's reason to rejoice and celebrate. Fear not, for your sins are completely forgiven! God is at peace with you. No more enmity. Rejoice, my fellow sinners! We have been baptized into Christ' all-redeeming death and resurrection. We belong to Christ! ! It is finished, in Christ alone and because of Christ alone.

This is the Reformation faith Jesus speaks this very day in our very midst to you, to me, and to all "this generation." Those who have ears to hear, may you hear and glorify God for all that He has done and continues to do for you, in Christ and because of Christ.

AMEN

The peace of God that passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. **Amen.**

Prayer of the Church Reformation Day 2018.

P Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs.

Brief silence

P Lord God, heavenly Father, You are our mighty fortress. In You we find our strength, our protection and our peace through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Through the shield of faith, protect us from the flaming arrows of the evil one, knowing that with the sword of the Word of God the gates of hell cannot prevail against us.

Now, we pray, help us in our every need. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P The old evil foe has sworn to harm us, to deceive us and to lead us away from You, O Lord. His attacks are strong from without, his inroads into the Church are often subtle. We cannot fight him or resist him in our own strength. We cannot conquer him with our good works or with our own power. - We praise You for sending Jesus, who fights for us. Through His holy cross, Jesus has forever conquered Satan, toppling his kingdom of darkness and setting us free. Protect Your Church, purchased by the blood of Jesus, from Satan's attacks. Continue to raise up faithful pastors like Martin Luther, warriors in Your Kingdom, who proclaim Jesus and His cross as our only hope and joy. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P All have sinned and fallen short of Your glory, O Lord. Good works could not avert our doom. But as Your strong Word cut the darkness with light at Your creation, it also bespeaks us righteous at the font. It is here where You made us Your own, granted us faith and clothed us with Your robe of righteousness. Cause us to return to our Baptism each day through the confession of our sins, holding firmly to Your promise that we are justified by faith apart from works of the Law. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P God of grace, keep us steadfast in Your Word that makes us Christ's disciples and teaches us Your truth. Guide our wayward hearts, so that we never follow the false gospels that lead us away from You. Provide for us and Your whole Church faithful pastors like Luther who preach with purity and joy that we are saved by Your grace alone through faith alone because of Christ alone. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P O Dayspring from on high, splendour of light everlasting, in Your love for us You came into this world, swallowed by the eternal night of sin and death, as the Light of light. Through Your Church, continue to shine the Gospel into this present darkness. Remove all that would obscure Your light from us: the temptation to turn Your gift into an earned wage, the urge of trusting the false light from within instead of the true light from above, and the despair of unbelief that comprehends neither light nor hope. Send out Your light and Your truth in Your Church, and let them bring us to Your holy hill. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P Lord, You have charged Your Church with the work of angels, to proclaim Your eternal Gospel to all who dwell on earth, to sing good news to every people, tribe, language and nation. Let Your Word not come back to You empty, but accomplish that which You desire, leading forth in joy all who trust in You. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P O Bread of life from heaven, You have given us life. Your truth has set us free. As we feast upon Your body and blood, we rejoice in the freedom of sonship that comes through the forgiveness of sins. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P All honour and glory are Yours, Almighty Father, with the Son and the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto the ages of ages. **Amen.**