

## RELEVANCE OF THE REFORMATION

*Then I saw another angel flying in mid-heaven, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people. Revelation 14:6*

Next week, at Immanuel Lutheran Church in Georgetown we are having The Rev. Daniel Deyell from Concordia Theological Seminary Edmonton preach to us at our Toronto Circuit Worship 3 p.m. You've seen the ads no doubt. But what you might not know is that The Rev. Deyell has an impressive resume that goes beyond your regular parish pastor. His resume is smattered with stints as director, curator, and lecturer in art museums and academia. I wonder what words he could use to say, "Describe your bulletin covers" depicting the Reformation Event. Luther nailing 95 theses on the castle church door in Wittenberg.

More than a thousand words if he wanted to. And easily, I'm certain. What meagre description might we amateurs give? The word for me is "dark". It was a dark age. When you felt sick the physician was likely to prescribe some bloodletting to "balance out the humours" which in fact, as well intentioned as he might be, would probably weaken our condition. It was a dark age, where people scarcely knew what it was to go beyond the borders of their own village while we, at a minimum, see the world, at least from my laptop computer, all the amazing places on that Amazing Race. And speaking of computers, what a dark age it was, where knowledge was limited so such an elite, reading the crumbs of Latin translations of the only marginally informed ancient Greeks while we possess whole libraries of books translated and written from around the globe are literally, just a click away.

What could someone immersed in such a dark age have that could possibly be relevant for us?

Seeing the darkness clearly, they were also prepared to see the Light.

### **Knowing the Darkness**

Luther and those living in such an age were prepared to see themselves as their picture. Black and white. Theirs was an age of black or white; heaven or hell; truth or heresy. They believed in the clarity of judgment day, where, our works are to be judged good or bad. It is clarity of the mind of Christ and the judgment of the Almighty. "Whoever is not for me is against me". "All the nations will be gathered before him, and He will separate them one from another as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats". We in contrast, burdened with many facts and arguments and mitigating circumstances have no clarity of judgment. We have no absolute truth. We are rather a society of gray. Just as we live our lives under the grey smog of our skies our morality is cluttered and confused: "a life of grey".

So it was an age that knew and saw the darkness. It was an age that had to confront the stark reality of death. In a society that either would not or could not sanitize death and hide it in hospitals or mortuaries, they dealt with death publically and out in the open. With minds uncluttered with all the interesting facts we have, they had a knowledge of all that dwelt in the "mid-heavens" under the evil authority of the "Prince of the power of the air". Luther knew the power of the devil and spoke of him often.

What is the cause of death? What is the cause of disease? What is the cause of war? What is the cause of crime? We are specialists in intermediate causes. We have volumes written on bacteria, improper hand washing, old age, poverty, lack of rent control, psychological disease. All I believe are true and valid causes for the woes of our condition. But these are but intermediate causes. With the volumes of sheer intermediate causes for us to read, examine and consider we

never seem to be able to probe beyond it all, to ultimate causes which the Medieval Man knew so well: “the devil, the world and our flesh”.

For Luther and those living in his age, they knew the depths of the darkness. They knew and believed in the reality of Satan while we only treat him as a plaything to be carted out perhaps at Halloween. They knew that “The wages of sin is death”. They spoke of the evils of this world. They knew the demonic that inhabit as unseen powers of the air.

### **Made Ready for the Light**

In a sense, they were a people prepared by the simplicity of their lives for the Gospel. Are we a people so prepared? By the power of the Holy Spirit working through the word we may be. Now, while Luther shared with his contemporaries the knowledge of absolute evil, he was drawn away from them by the Holy Spirit to receive the Gospel. The Gospel is true Light because it is far from what human beings could conceive in their own hearts. It is pure light from something outside the limited scope of human knowledge or experience. It is held in the hand of the angel or messenger. Who is he a messenger of? Almighty God!

How can I say that the Gospel is outside our ability to conceive? Look at the answers Oprah gives. Look at the answers to the dark things of this world that the politicians, scientists and self-help types give. The answers change. They are rephrased. Still there is no real progress. “The answer lies within”, is foundational to their teaching. And this is shaky, if you believe, as you ought to, based simply on casual observation of the human condition, that we are incapable of doing the good.

Yet God makes everything “very good” and begins to restore it to the very good. He has taken concrete steps and followed through. He sent

the prophets. He sent His Son. His Son fulfilled the mission. He lived the good life we could not live. He sacrificed that life upon the cross. He suffered, died and rose again from the dead. He appeared to many, and to us all, through their witness. He established His Church so that the gates of hell could not prevail against her. And it is so. The Church endures because the Gospel endures forever, for the Almighty sends the Gospel. And the Gospel gives Light to the Nations.

Look at who is taking the initiative? Who is the one acting? It is God. This is Grace. This is one of the great Reformation themes. God's grace brings salvation. He is the one who saves not of our own efforts lest any man should boast!

For proclaimers of the Truth, such as Luther, the answer to such dark evil is "the eternal Gospel". The eternal Gospel is enduring. It is as enduring as the sinful human condition and the consequences of death are enduring.

The Gospel has endured from the days of its first proclamation in the Garden of Eden to the days of the Prophets who pointed towards a coming suffering servant as in Isaiah 53 who would take away the sins of the world. It endured to the coming of the Messiah in Bethlehem, to the cross at Calvary. It endured to the establishment of the Church and its continuance through oppression by Emperors and the onslaught of dark ages. It endured through fire, pillar and sword. It endures through the days of Luther to our own every bit as relevant to the reality of sin and death which no one can deny.

### **A Message to All Nations**

The messenger takes it to all nations.

We might not be angels, but we can perform the function of angels and be God's messengers flying through mid-heaven, especially in our day. Radio broadcasts go through the mid-heaven. Internet goes through the mid-heavens. Did you know that our web-site is actually viewed by many people throughout the world? Some listen to these sermons on audio. Locally, a nursing home administrator called me to bring spiritual care to one of her patients. How did she find us? Through mid-heaven over the internet.

It is incredible and hearting to see how this Message of God's Love can stir the hearts of people from so many diverse nations, tribes, languages and peoples. This fact I believe is testimony to its truth.

Looking through Lutheranism 101 book that we'll be studying in Bible Class in the coming year, I see a whole chapter on where the Lutheran Church flourishes. I remember my grandfather saying "Lutheran? Isn't that German?" Well it's certainly more than for Germans today and always has been because the Gospel is for everyone.

The Lutheran Church is a worldwide Church. It is in South America. We have Lois and Tony going to Nicaragua. We have churches in the Ukraine. There are some in Poland. There are many in Asia. They are growing in Africa. I have names, phone numbers, addresses with clergy listed. It's real. All because the messenger has flown through mid-air.

You and I can become that messenger. This is our Reformation responsibility today. We have a relevant message that has endured through the ages. Into the Darkness we may bring Gospel Light.

The Door of the Castle Church Door at Wittenberg opened and let in the Light. It has been a Light that has brought hope to generations that followed Luther and to generations that may follow us.

Rejoice in the relevance of the Reformation Today.

Amen.