Church of the Lutheran Confession's

Ministry By Mail

"Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." Romans 10:17

Reformation Sunday

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Scripture Readings

Revelation 14:6-7, 12-13 ; Matthew 11:12-15

Hymns from The Lutheran Hymnal (1941)

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Prayer of the Day

We thank Thee, almighty God and Father, that Thou hast had such fatherly mercy on us, and that, through Thy precious instrument, Martin Luther, Thou hast let the light of Thy holy Word, that alone justifieth, be preached clear and pure, to the shame of all corruption and idolatry, and we beseech Thee, govern us by Thy Holy Spirit, that we may ceaselessly trust the Gospel, live it worthily, and, in the end, die happy and blessed in such confidence, through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, one true God, world without end. Amen.

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Sermon Text

(Proverbs 26:11 KJV) "As a dog returneth to his vomit, so a fool returneth to his folly."

Theme

Old Habits Die Hard

Our focus this Reformation Day is the sinner's nasty bad habit of veering from God's plain truth, in contrast to the Lord's faithfulness in refocusing you on His pure Word. To that end, I offer this sermon text from the Proverbs of wise King Solomon: "As a dog

returneth to his vomit, so a fool returneth to his folly." Lord Jesus, bless Thy Word that we may trust in Thee. Amen.

Of the great many abuses that had crept into Christ's church and overwhelmed it in spiritual darkness by the time of Martin Luther, perhaps the most glaring example was the collection and veneration of religious relics.

Any major church by Luther's time had some sort of biblical artifact out on public display. A strip of cloth purportedly touched by Jesus—the closer you got to it, the closer you got to Him. Some object belonging to Mary or one of the saints which, if you got to rub it like a genie's lamp, might get you your wish. And the most prized of all relics: a splinter of wood from the very cross upon which Jesus suffered and died. There were so many of these splinters of the true cross scattered across Europe—Luther commented—that it must have taken a forest of trees to crucify our Lord.

How did it get this way? Well, the Bible warns, "As a dog returneth to his vomit, so a fool returneth to his folly." With so little access to the light of God's Word under the papacy, the people had, by nature, reverted to the ways of man without faithful Bible preaching: full-out paganism. Open idolatry of stuff and things, superstitious fables, and doubt about just about anything concerning the one true God.

It was only the Reformation's clarion call to return to Holy Scripture as the sole standard of truth that exposed all this as the false religion it was. The angel in our epistle rightly proclaims: "Fear God, and give glory to Him!"

In that Reformation, Luther translated God's Word into the language of the people for them to gladly hear and learn for the first time in centuries. What did Scripture teach? It boldly proclaimed that heaven is yours by Christ's blood and merit. And it called for a thorough reassessment of everything we do in church that conflicts with what God wants you to receive from every encounter with His Word of life—the forgiveness of sins.

But as the saying goes, "Old habits die hard." Like dogs eager to lap up their own vomit, it wasn't long after Luther's death that those old foolish ways of man tried to creep back in. Political leaders organized funeral processions through multiple cities and had Luther's corpse on public display so long that they had to be convinced it was well past time to bury his body in the dirt. There were mass printings of Luther's portrait, and people were encouraged simply to hang it up in their homes, right where they used to have a picture of the pope. And relics—Luther's personal belongings, cloth, and trinkets—were sold and collected, as if the possession of any such object made you more Lutheran. There were even pieces of wood, splinters from the bedpost of Luther's deathbed.

This is an unsavory tidbit of Reformation history: those faithful to Luther's pure doctrine had to preach against all those bad habits of the sinful flesh and, so soon, contend for the light of God's simple truth. You see, what the Christian, and thus the Christian church, must always be on guard against is the old man's relentless attempt to wander and stray from the holy Word of God.

You might not have any sixteenth-century religious relics lying about the house, but you certainly do know what it is for an old habit to rear its ugly head. A folly you vowed never to repeat—until you do. The shame of a sin that seemed completely justified in the moment and only reeked of vomit after the fact. Each bad habit you promise to give up… tomorrow.

What bad habits rear their heads in our hearts? A superstitious mindset toward our Creator? Desperate doubt that accompanies any loss, as if your God were a fickle lord who changes his mind on a whim? Trying to barter with God, as if you'll get your life together once God gives you what you want?

Just as surely as Luther's body rotted in the earth, someday ours will too. So too will every relic held in hand and heart—none of them lasting, none eternal. Holding on to none of these things, then, which all fade and burn away, hearken unto the Reformation's certain trumpet blast: "Fear God! Turn to His Word! Give glory to His name!" And find in that Word a Savior whose body lives beyond the grave, whose Gospel is everlasting. To Him you may cling as your hope in this world, past your grave's portal, into the next.

When the Son of God wandered among us, He encountered His own share of superstitious confusion. But in each case, He refocused the soul on the plain foundations of Gospel truth: Scripture alone, faith alone, grace alone.

To a crowd that cried out misdirected praise for His mother—"Blessed is the womb that bare Thee!"—as if venerating Mary might be the way to His heart, Jesus redirected them to the Bible as the perfect revelation of His love: "Yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it."

To those confused about why Zacchaeus and others would be chosen for any honor, Jesus proclaimed He had been sent to gather a collection of repentant sinners, as many as He could find, out of the foolish ways of this world and into the kingdom of heaven: "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." You see, because old habits die hard, only the death of our Savior could put a hard and fast end to your sin. Jesus suffered and died so that every filthy habit of yours—as far as your God is concerned—would be cast away. Not one of your sins remains in Christ. The blood of one man, Jesus, washed them all away.

Thus, when Peter and John make their way to peek into Christ's tomb, they find no body, only the grave clothes Jesus left behind, including a cloth neatly folded in the grave as proof that all things are in order. Death no longer has to be feared; someday you'll leave your coffin empty too.

Old habits die hard. Even after having seen the empty tomb herself, Mary reverts to a foolish search through the garden for His body. Jesus gently rebukes her and calls her back to His promise: "Touch me not… but go… say [to the rest], 'I ascend unto My Father, and your Father… to My God, and your[s].'"

You know what that means? It was Jesus saying, "I leave nothing behind except My Word (which includes His sacraments). And My Word is all you need." Cling to that Word

alone as eternal treasure, so that, by faith in Christ's victory over sin, death, and hell, you might go about life freed from the burden of man's confusion and doubt.

But be ever on guard, lest our light be shrouded in darkness once more. Oh, how quickly after Luther's death the faithful needed to contend for the truth, almost as if all had been forgotten! Well, the Apostle Peter uses that dog-vomit image to warn you that you shouldn't be so shocked that the varied Lutheran groups today have similarly invited all sorts of nasty old habits into their midst. They claim, mind you, that this is in the name of Luther, but it is no more so than when people put up pictures of Luther where they once had a picture of the pope. They are as Peter describes: "While they promise [you] liberty… it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, 'The dog is turned to his own vomit again.'" They claim to have moved on to bigger and better ideas than the supposedly outdated Lutheran doctrine we still teach and preach. But in truth, they are turning to nothing new, only old vomit.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is openly spewing forth the filthiest desires of the sinful flesh as God-pleasing. The Missouri Synod is steadily casting doubt on Scripture as the sole inerrant foundation of all we preach, and the Wisconsin Synod is increasingly fascinated with anything other than plain Law-Gospel preaching, turning to pop-Christianity's substance and style, which appeal to the natural mind of man.

Will the Lord keep us faithful to the Bible as God's Word and to Luther's pure doctrine? It begins with you—with the Reformation principle that each Christian, each of you, is responsible to believe and teach only what the Bible teaches, to keep your congregation on course and your preacher accountable to all the Bible has to say. And with keeping the Bible prominently displayed in your home and life as your most prized possession, eagerly collecting as many of its truths into your heart as you can.

Also, each day you find yourself returning to old habits and ways, that Old Adam in you should "be drowned"—die hard—"by daily contrition and repentance… and… a new man should daily come forth and arise." In place of those old habits, form new habits of holy living through Word and Sacrament. Speak God's truth in love to those still caught in error's maze. Spread His light, as encapsulated in the six chief parts of Luther's catechism, from this generation to the next through faithful Bible preaching. This is no mere baby food, but true meat indeed, to sustain young and old each day until heaven is yours.

Pray, then, that God keep firmly in our midst that treasure so sadly and quickly abandoned by man, so that, by His good grace, we might ever enjoy the good pasture of His holy Word.

Now the peace that passeth all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Pastor Timothy Daub

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All scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the King James Version.