

From Marty to Zack and Back: Reformation Living Today October 30, 2016 Luke 19:1-10

Four hundred ninety-nine years ago, Martin Luther launched a revolution in the Roman Catholic Church. He posted ninety-five propositions for debate on the door of the Wittenberg Castle Church. The first of those ninety-five theses says this: “*When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, ‘Repent’ ...he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.*”

What does Luther mean? Today’s gospel reading can help us experience the Reformation here and now. **Christian living means “Repent, Release and Reform.”** That’s today’s main thought. **Christian living means “Repent, Release and Reform.”**

Last week we heard Jesus’ parable about the Pharisee and the Tax Collector. The tax collector in the parable got his trust issues straightened out. He came to the Temple and prayed the prayer of the desperate: “*God be merciful to me, a sinner.*” In terms of Luther’s *Small Catechism*, the tax collector came to fear, love and trust God above all things. He went home in a right relationship with God.

One chapter later in Luke, we meet a real, live tax collector. His name is Zacchaeus. He doesn’t go to the Temple to repent. He climbs a sycamore tree to get a glance at Jesus from afar. Jesus recognizes this action as real repentance. “*Zacchaeus,*” Jesus calls to him, “*hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.*” Remember, Jesus is the guy who eats with tax collectors and sinners. That’s what the Kingdom of God really looks like.

Zacchaeus needs what Jesus has. And the little man Zach admits his need. That’s repentance. Do you come to the Lord’s Table deeply conscious of your brokenness, desperate for mercy, hungry for hope? Then Jesus will stay at your house today and give you life!

Christian living means “Repent, Release and Reform.”

Repentance leads to release. Martin Luther was sure he deserved God’s punishment. No matter how much he did to be holy, it could never be enough. “I, blameless monk that I was,” Luther wrote, “[I] felt that before God I was a sinner with an extremely troubled conscience. I couldn’t be sure that God was appeased by my satisfaction. I did not love, no, rather I hated the just God who punishes sinners.”

Luther then found that God doesn’t long for our perfection. God longs for our trust, our reliance on God’s gracious mercy. That’s what faith is. That’s why we are justified by faith. With that discovery, Luther experienced a blessed release. “All at once,” he wrote, “I felt that I had been born again and entered into paradise itself through open gates.”

That is the power of the Good News of Jesus Christ. When we drown in despair, when we agonize with anxiety, when we pursue perfection, there is the Gospel of grace and mercy. God comes to us in Jesus to release us from sin, death and evil. God comes to move us from death to life daily and forever.

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Repentance leads to release. Release leads to reform. For Zacchaeus, reform was connected to money. We read that “Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, ‘Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.’”

Without concrete action to repair the damage we cannot access the grace God offers us. Nothing changes until something changes. When Zacchaeus made a commitment to change Jesus made a stunning announcement: *“Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.”*

Zacchaeus understood that when it comes to faith talk is cheap. When I look at our weekly offerings over the last six months, I am deeply troubled. As the totals have been posted each week, I have become increasingly depressed, demoralized and desperate. A year ago, we made promises to increase giving substantially here at Emanuel. On the basis of those promises we built a budget that increased salaries and ramped up programs. We are spending that money based on those promises.

It seems, however, that something is not right. If the message of these offerings is that I should serve a different congregation, I would rather someone would tell me. Even if that is not the message, that will soon be the result unless things change. I believe that Emanuel Lutheran Church is on the verge of another great generation of mission and service. Today we heard about one of the directions for that great future. I would like to be part of that future. But without a significant change in weekly giving, I will have to be part of the future somewhere else.

I apologize if these words upset you. However, the information has been available every week in the announcements handed out to you and every month in the reports of our financial secretary and treasurer. I hope you will pay some attention to that information and respond appropriately and immediately.

Christian living means “Repent, Release and Reform.”

“When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, ‘Repent’ ...he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.” We are the heirs of that great Reformation Revolution. I pray that the Reformation will be more than a history lesson among us today.

Let’s pray...

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