

## Reformation Sunday – November 4, 2018

### Revelation 14:6-7

6 Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people. 7 He said in a loud voice, “Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water.”

Yes, it’s that time of the year again. The time of the year when the leaves have fallen and need to be raked or mowed or mulched. The time of the year, now that daylight savings time has ended, when the evenings become dark much more quickly. The time of the year when many children and even adults have had their fill of candy either from trick-or-treating or post-Halloween sales in the stores. The time of the year when we get to speak some Latin. Today we are celebrating the Festival of Reformation where we look back and remember what Martin Luther did on that first Reformation day, October 31<sup>st</sup>, 1517. At that time the language of the church was Latin and much of what was written by the church fathers, including the 95 Theses that Luther posted on the Castle Church door in Wittenberg, was written in Latin. You may be familiar with the Latin watchwords of the Reformation, *sola gratia, sola fide, sola Scriptura*, by grace alone, by faith alone, by Scripture alone. But there is another Latin phrase to focus on this morning/evening, *Soli Deo Gloria!* To God alone be the glory! That is one of the exhortations made by the angel in our text from Revelation 14: **Give God Glory!** As we examine our text and focus on the Reformation we will look at two reasons why we are to give him glory, first because **he saves us through the gospel** and secondly because **he rules on behalf of his Church.**

The book of Revelation is a series of visions that the Apostle John had while he was exiled on the island of Patmos. These verses from chapter 14 mention an “angel flying in midair” (v. 6) and actually there are two more angels in the following verses who also make proclamations. These angels came to bring comfort after what John had witnessed in chapter 13. There he saw the beast out of the sea and the beast out of the earth who had come to deceive and destroy the people of the world. But all was not lost for the saints—John reminded them that the situation called for faithfulness and patient endurance on their part (13:10, 14:12).

Verse six says that this first angel “had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people.” The gospel, the good news that Jesus came to take away the sins of all people, that good news is eternal, it does not change over time. But just because the gospel is eternal, does not mean that it might not be lost at times. That is what had happened to the church at the time of Martin Luther. They had lost their focus on the gospel message, they had taken their focus off of Christ. More important was what the pope taught through his church. That included a focus on work righteousness. People could earn their salvation by what they did. When Luther posted his 95 Theses he was protesting the sale of indulgences—if you wanted forgiveness for your sins, time off of purgatory, you could buy a piece of paper. It’s not that God’s Word wasn’t preached in their churches, the problem was that the church services were in Latin and many people in Germany couldn’t understand them and so compare what their leaders were telling them with God’s Word.

Martin Luther grew up Catholic, became a monk, even a priest and was trained in the ways of the church. But as he studied the Bible, as he read that eternal gospel, he realized what his church was missing. Namely that salvation came by grace alone, not because we merit

anything, by faith alone and not because of the works we do, and by Scripture alone, not by what the pope or church leaders may decide on their own. The Reformation was not changing the church simply for the sake of change or to try out something new and different. Rather it was a return to that eternal gospel message, which had been lost by many, but was still waiting to be found on the pages of Scripture.

As we look around the Christian world today we can see places that have lost the gospel. Europe as a continent has for many years had less and less to do with religion, even in Germany, the land of the Reformation. In our own country, many church bodies focus more on making this world a better place rather than on preaching the gospel. Even church bodies that call themselves Lutheran may not keep the same focus of the Reformation. Is there a danger of us losing the gospel in the WELS or even here at St. John's? Will the gospel still be preached here at St. John's ten, twenty, fifty years down the road? Of course we cannot answer that. We know our enemies—the devil, the world and our sinful flesh—will work hard to fight against us. This is why we keep coming back to what the angel proclaimed: Give God Glory! We give God glory because he has saved us through that gospel message. We are saved not because we have earned or deserved it, but because we as sinners have been forgiven through Jesus' life and death. This gospel is eternal. No matter what changes in our world, this message does not change and so still applies. The angel was to proclaim that message “to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people” (v. 6b) because this message is for everyone. This is the message that Luther proclaimed, the same that we today as Lutherans proclaim. We give God glory for preserving his gospel and pray that it may continue to be proclaimed here at St. John's. Whatever ministry or programs we have at our church and school, we will keep in mind that everything we do is for that eternal gospel, whether it's nurturing those who already have it or sharing it with someone new.

Martin Luther made a bold stand by posting his 95 Theses. Not only was he proclaiming the eternal gospel, he was also opening himself up to criticism and attacks. He would be called before councils and diets and asked to recant, to take back what he said. But he did not and instead gave glory to God. Luther faced arguments and ridicule for his stand, from leaders of the church, from members of the government, some of whom probably had been his friends and associates. But there was more persecution. His own life was threatened. He was declared a heretic and an outlaw and so had to be hidden for a time in the castle Wartburg. He was protected by the elector Frederick in his home province of Saxony, but if he had tried to travel to another part of Germany he would have been arrested or even killed.

At the time of the Reformation it was not just Luther that faced such threats. Many princes and leaders stood up for Luther and what he taught. At the presentation of the Augsburg Confession, Luther could not attend and so laymen took his place and confessed the faith that they had in the eternal gospel. The princes and leaders risked losing control of their lands; they risked having their people face war from the Catholic princes and the Holy Roman Emperor. And yet they gave God the glory because he protected his church and ruled on its behalf so that they could stand up to the face of such persecution.

The early Lutherans at the time of the Reformation faced persecution for the beliefs they professed. Is there such persecution today? As we look around the world, there are many Christians who are persecuted for their faith. In many Muslim and communist countries, people are not allowed to proclaim the eternal gospel. They can be threatened or put into jail or even killed for their beliefs. And yet even here in our country with our religious freedom, we too can face persecution. Even though it may not be life threatening, it can threaten the church and

hamper our proclamation of the gospel. It may be rules at work or at school where personal religious beliefs are not allowed to be expressed. Or it may be pressure from friends, co-workers, or family members. “I don’t want to hear about your religion stuff. Why do you believe something like that? It’s not very loving or caring to say that someone else or some other belief is wrong!” When we hear these things, the temptation is to give in. We do not want to cause any friction. We don’t want the feeling of being rejected. Life will just be easier if we let it go and move on with our lives. We don’t have to worry about persecution, if no one even knows that we are a Christian!

But hear again verse 7 of our text: “He said in a loud voice, ‘Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water.’” It is at these times of weakness that we give God glory. Because we can do nothing on our own, it is our God who protects us and rules on our behalf. He is in control—he is the God who has made the heavens and the earth. He is also the God who judges. We have no need to fear his coming judgment because we have been saved by grace through faith. But that coming judgment is what we want to warn others about so that they too can be saved. If we remain quiet to avoid persecution, they may miss the reason for the confidence that we have. Jesus spoke of these things in our Gospel lesson: “You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them. And the gospel must first be preached to all nations” (Mk 13:9-10). Jesus says that in these days there will be persecution, but of utmost importance is the proclamation of the gospel. But he adds this comfort: “Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry before hand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit” (13:11). We give God glory because he is working through us and will rule for his Church.

These verses from Revelation were used at Luther’s funeral. What an appropriate text to be read when celebrating the life of a servant of the Lord. The focus is not on all the great things that Luther the man had done, but the glory was given to God who had used the man for his work. God brought to light once again his eternal gospel which reveals his grace for sinful human beings. God also deserves glory for ruling on behalf of his Church, guarding and protecting his people as they face the trials of this world. On this Reformation Sunday may we always remember what our Lord did through a man like Martin Luther and pray that he may do the same through our lives. Soli Deo Gloria! Amen.