

October 31, 2021

Revelation 14:6-7

“Fear God and Give Him Glory!”

Pilgrim Lutheran Church
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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Before Luther found himself in an Augustinian monastery, he was training to be a lawyer. What precipitated his entrance into the monastery was his terror over dying only then to face an angry God in judgment. While he was studying to become a lawyer he found himself at death's door two times.

The first time was in 1503 when he was traveling home for Easter. The sword he was carrying cut his leg and severed a main artery. He nearly bled to death before a doctor could be found to sew up the wound. Then, in 1505 and on the verge of becoming a lawyer, he was caught outside in a terrible thunderstorm that was so close that it threatened to take his life. In a moment of panic and desperation, Luther called out to Saint Anne to save him and promised to become a monk if she did. He survived the storm and entered the Augustinian cloister of Erfurt several weeks later. He was certain that in the monastery he would be able to do good works for God so that his terror of death and his utter dread of facing an angry God would finally go away. It only made things worse. He realized that he could never do enough - he could never be perfect as God demands.

“A bad conscience is hell.” Luther once remarked, “I ask you: What sweet and pure joy can the wicked have - even though they have and obtain all they desire - as long as their conscience can find no peace? Does a more terrible evil exist than the unrest of a gnawing conscience?” So, how about you? How's your conscience? If you were to die in the next few minutes or if the trumpet were to sound heralding the return of Jesus are you really ready to face him. Are you living at peace in the forgiveness of sins through Jesus and his cross? Or, do you have an evil conscience that is utterly terrified?

It is written in Hebrews 10:21-23, “... since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.” The perfect love of Jesus and his self-sacrifice on the cross cleanses us from an evil conscience to give us a conscience that is at peace in the forgiveness of sins. Terror over death and judgment has to do with punishment. Whenever our hearts condemn us, God and his love for us in Jesus Christ is greater than our hearts. Jesus lived a perfect life on our behalf and absorbed into himself all of our sins no matter how great they may be. He suffered for small sins and big sins and for all sins that we think are impossible to be forgiven. He died our death so that we might have eternal life.

And when we doubt these things as we might do, the apostle Peter reminds us of what has been done in our lives through baptism. He writes (1 Peter 3:21-22): “Baptism ... now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God ...” Yes! Jesus rules the universe to save us and has given us a baptism that reassures us that the filth of our lives has been washed away in him. God forbid that we return to the filth. Jesus says, “He that believes and is baptized will be saved (Mark 16:16).” And we beg in the Lutheran service, “grant this Lord unto us all!”

Today we celebrate the Reformation. Normally we think of it as starting with the nailing of the 95 theses, and in a sense that is where it started in Germany and throughout Europe. But, before the bright light of the Gospel returned to many in the Western church, Martin Luther was tortured with a gnawing conscience. By the power of his Word, God lifted Luther out of despair. It was in the Psalms and in the book of Romans that Luther came to know and believe that Jesus Christ had lived for him and died for all of his sins. It was in the Bible that Luther found the righteousness of God in Jesus and the hope of heaven.

To those of us who may be in deep anguish by spiritual sadness today or in the near future, Luther would remind us: “When in real anguish, a conscience should think of Christ and know absolutely nothing but Christ alone and should then exert its powers to the utmost to put the Law out of sight as far as it possibly can and to embrace nothing but the promise of Christ.” This is sound advice and takes us away from clinging to ourselves and our good works. It teaches us to cling only to the cross and the good works of Jesus. We are bid in Scripture to remove far away from us the idea that when we do wrong that it is up to us to make it right. Paul writes in Ephesians 2:8-9 that it is “by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”

Any boasting that we may do is only a boasting in what Jesus has done for us. That is why Luther states that we should think of Christ and know absolutely nothing but Christ alone. Only he can put an end to a despairing heart and conscience that are steeped in sadness. Luther admonishes us: “When your conscience is terrified by the Law and wrestles with the judgment of God, consult neither your reason nor the Law, but rest upon grace alone and upon the Word of consolation.” Here Luther is pointing us to the means of grace - to the Word and Sacraments. In the means of grace we find Jesus and the end of a despairing and evil conscience.

With these things in mind, we are now brought to our first reading for this Reformation Sunday. John writes in Revelation 14:6-7, “Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people. And he said with a loud voice, ‘**Fear God and give him glory**, because the hour of his judgment has come, and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water.’”

In this text the eternal gospel is summarized with the words “**Fear God and Give Him Glory!**” What exactly does it mean to fear God and give him glory? That’s a good question. Well, before we answer it we should first know that there are two types of fear in the Bible: servile and filial fear. Servile fear is what we may call slavish dread. Servile fear is to dread God and his punishment so much that you only do what is right because you are afraid of getting caught and punished. Servile fear is terror over judgment and drives us away from a loving God. Here one ends up actually hating him.

Filial fear (friendly fear) is rooted in the gospel of God’s love for us through the life and cross of Jesus - the forgiveness of all our sins and salvation. Psalm 34 says, “Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him! Oh, fear the Lord, you his saints, for those who fear him have no lack! The young lions suffer want and hunger; but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.” Filial fear is first of all the gospel of forgiveness and having everything in Jesus. And having

everything in Jesus is an ongoing seeking of the Lord which is a filial fear - a love that wells up within us that is so great that we earnestly desire to never lose him. It is summed up in Job 28:28, "Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to turn away from evil is understanding." To have wisdom is to have Jesus and his cross, and to have Jesus and his cross is to turn away from anything that will remove us from Jesus and that cross. This is what it means to **Fear God and Give Him Glory!**

For Luther, filial fear was like a child who has tremendous respect and love for his father because his father earnestly loves him with himself and all things. Consequently, such a child who has received such a loving father and the great gifts he gives will not be of the mind to lose that father by offending him. Such a child would rather live in that love and give glory to that love by loving his father and everyone else as he himself has been loved. Such filial fear grows a strong confidence in the child that he may always face his father and never be afraid. So it is to **Fear God and Give Him Glory!** For the Christian, it is to see the loving heart of the Father in Jesus and to know and believe that in the hour of death or on the day of judgment all is well. This is the enduring legacy of Luther and the Reformation.

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott