

**Sunday, October 29, 2017 – 500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Reformation**  
**“What Did You Come Here to See?”**

Matthew 11: 7-19

Rev. Derek S. Klemm, Mountain View Lutheran Church, Las Vegas, NV  
Question Answered

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

What a day! Cross processions, the red stole, used for special occasions, the pomp and circumstance, and we're even singing "A Mighty Fortress." Later today, for the first time in my years here as a pastor all our circuit churches are gathering together right here to have a big worship and celebration. It must be Reformation Sunday. No doubt, it was more than pure coincidence that the first official worship service for Mountain View was on October 31, 1957, 60 years ago this week – a church built on the teachings of the Reformation. Today is not only an observance of the Reformation, but it is the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of it!

If you don't know what the Reformation is, here's the two sentence crash course – on October 31, 1517 a then-Catholic priest named Martin Luther set a debate in motion that led to churches going back to the source of the Bible for what we believe and why – it's the event that led to the formation of every Protestant denomination you can think of today, including our own. It also led to major social reforms that emphasized the rights of individuals and eventually ushered in democratic governments first in the West and today throughout the world. Many Lutheran Christians are especially excited to celebrate the truths from the Bible that were rediscovered and embraced because of the Reformation of the church – that we are saved by God's grace, through faith in Jesus Christ, not by what we do. If you want to know more about all this, we'll be starting a video series on Sunday mornings beginning November 19<sup>th</sup> during the adult education hour to do just that.

Saved by grace through faith in Jesus and not by what you do – that's good news worth celebrating, for sure! And there can be a lot of hoopla around it all – no less for the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary. And people are celebrating. There are Martin Luther reenactments complete with authentic 16<sup>th</sup> century dress, bratwurst and beer... kind of the Lutheran version of what Bonnie Springs and Calico are to the Old West. What did you come here to see today?

Jesus asks a similar question in our Gospel reading: "What did you go out into the desert to see?" Jesus was speaking to a crowd about the prophet John the Baptist – a rather eccentric

fellow who lived out in the desert, preached to people to repent and dressed in clothes made of camel hair and lived on locusts and wild honey. They didn't come to see a reed swayed around by the wind or to see a man dressed in fine clothes like you'd see in king's palaces, but to see a prophet. In fact, in Jesus' estimation not only the greatest prophet but the greatest individual ever born of a woman up until that time. This is the one preparing the way for God to come to the people. And yet both John and Jesus, failing to meet the expectations of what many in that generation at that time came out to see were disappointed with what it was really all about – giving up of themselves while befriending sinners.

This is the kind of tension going on in 16<sup>th</sup> century Europe – over the centuries the important things got crowded out by the noise. The alluring things at that time were praying to saints and venerating relics like the purported nails pierced into Jesus' cross or the disciple Peter's femur or a lock of Mary's hair. You can find favor with God and make Him happy with you if you just... While there may still be echoes of this attitude today, our allurements are different. Money and possessions, self-fulfillment and personal happiness. How often are churches and religions remade in that model – you do can find wealth and success and great health and be happy if you just... what did you come here to see?

The news of the Reformation is basically the news that Jesus spoke that many found so disappointing. Not extra offerings to God for extra favor, not making pilgrimages or looking at holy relics. Whatever we've come here to see has the potential to take our focus off of what really matters.

What did you come here to do? Allow me to say this provocatively on this 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary occasion – Jesus' words in this Gospel reading from Matthew will not permit Reformation Sunday to be a toot your horn, self-congratulatory back-slapping celebration. Such an occasion would be in contradiction to the Gospels themselves. We don't focus on human achievement or revel in our historic culture (which, by the way, the word "our" applies to fewer and fewer of us all the time) but rather we're here gathered around the humbling, mighty deeds of God. Remember too that many brothers and sisters in Christ, rather than celebrate see this occasion as a solemn undoing of visible unity in God's church. Jesus said, "Let the one who has ears hear."

We gather around preaching and the Word of God, and around the heavy lifting God does through His sacraments, delivering forgiveness and the promise of eternal life, doing stuff to you and changing you and remaking you into something new. I'm not saying we shouldn't be thankful for God's faithfulness or forget what happened 500 years ago but today especially, we remember what this is really all about. John came neither eating nor drinking and was written off as having a demon. Jesus came eating and drinking and people called wrote him off as unholy, consorting with sinners. That's our call – be wise seeing what God was saying and doing through John – repent. Watch Jesus befriend those farthest from God. And hear Luther echo that, what he learned from the Bible, "Hear that salvation is for sinners by grace through faith for Christ's sake alone." Hear Paul, that Christ came to seek and save sinners, of whom I am the worst.

God has not placed us here to enjoy a life of privilege or comfort with those dressed in soft clothing in king's palaces. Life as the people of God can bring violent consequences, ridicule and suffering – for our spirituality, in our relationships, of our material belongings and to our physical body. We celebrate the Reformation not because it's the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary but because the fog that stops us from seeing that we're united to Jesus our Lord not through relics and prayers or through money and happiness – that fog is cleared. We celebrate because Jesus reveals God's wisdom and love by befriending sinners like you and me. We celebrate because God's mighty deeds are on display not only this week but every time we gather. We celebrate because whatever we might lose or suffer, we have sure and certain promises of God in which to hope. We celebrate because this gift is for everyone and God has put us in our neighborhood, in our city both to point people to Jesus like John the Baptist and love people like Jesus, whoever they may be and whatever violence against our spirit, relationships, possessions or body may come. What did you come here to see? With clarity to see right, with ears unplugged by sin – I come to see God's mighty acts. I come to see Jesus. In Jesus' name, Amen.