

Reformation 2023
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 JUDGEMENT HAS COME, AND WORSHIP HIM WHO MADE HEAVEN AND EARTH, THE SEA AND THE SPRINGS OF WATER."

For decades, a story has circulated around Detroit, Michigan. That story tells of how a man's old Model T sputtered and stopped and had to be pushed to the side of the highway. Shortly thereafter, a sleek chauffeur-driven limo pulled up and a white-haired old man got out. Speaking to the stranded driver he asked, "Do you need some help?" The driver replied, "All help is appreciated." With that the old fellow took off his jacket, did some of this and that under the Model T's hood and, in less time than it takes to tell, had the jalopy purring. Amazed, the once-stranded motorist wondered, "Amazing, how did you do that?" The old fellow smiled and said, "I ought to be able to fix it. My name is Henry Ford and I built that car."

That's a great story, because, yes, no one would know the Model T better than Henry Ford, the man who invented it. In that same vein, it is good for us to remember that no one knows God better than God.

I call that to your attention because today is Reformation Sunday. As good Lutherans, we know that the Reformation began on October 31, 1517, when the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther his 95 Theses on the Castle Church door in Wittenberg.

What inspired Martin Luther to post the 95 Theses was something that the pope at that time did. The pope said that the church was going to

have a special jubilee indulgence. It promised to the purchaser the complete forgiveness of all his/her sins, plus, the remission of any temporal or eternal punishment associated with those sins. The indulgences were being sold so that the profits could be used to build St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome. Luther posted his 95 Theses because he wanted a public debate on the power and usefulness of indulgences.

I tell you that so that you understand the pope and the Roman Catholic Church were breaking the 2nd Commandment. Yes, you're right, that's the one about God's name, "You shall not take the name of the Lord, your God, in vain." But, we must remember that the 2nd Commandment is not so much about profanity, as it is false doctrine – telling lies about God. In fact, Luther Himself would later put it this way in the Large Catechism,

The greatest abuse occurs in spiritual matters. These have to do with the conscience, when false preachers rise up and offer their lying vanities as God's Word.¹

In other words, the pope was telling lies about God.

So, remembering that no one knows God better than God, the book of Revelation tells us God did this: 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. I know our English translation reads "Angel;" but the word can just as correctly be translated as "messenger," that messenger was Martin Luther.

No one knows God as well as God, and the hour of His judgement had come. God was tired of the lie that forgiveness could be bought with an indulgence; as though forgiveness of sins could be purchased with cash money like a gallon of milk or a new pair of shoes.

So, God sent His messenger Luther to teach us that the selling of indulgences was an attack on the eternal Gospel. The eternal Gospel says to every sinner of every nation, tribe, language, and people, that the forgiveness of sins comes solely by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Forgiveness of sin cannot be purchased. It is given as a free gift to you from God because of Jesus' suffering and death and it comes to you through the Word and Sacraments.

St. Paul said this, *For by works of the law no human being will be justified in His sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin (Ro 3:20)*. That means we cannot earn the forgiveness of our sins and make ourselves right with God by our good works – whether that good work is buying indulgences or not eating meat on Fridays; praying to Mecca 5x every day; not dancing, playing cards, or drinking booze; donating a gazillion dollars, or shoveling the snow from our neighbor's driveway.

Even though we cannot save ourselves, there is hope and joy for us poor, miserable sinners. Remember, no one knows God better than God and God wants us to know that He is love. In His love for us, He took it upon Himself to save us. And He did it by sending His only-begotten Son to save us.

The very Son of God shouldered the sin of the world -- your sins and my sin -- and carried them to the cross. Jesus died and was buried, but He didn't stay that way. Three days after Jesus' lifeless body had been placed into that tomb, days after a guard had been set at His grave, and a seal placed upon His not-so-final resting place, Jesus rose from the dead. The guards at the tomb saw Him; some women who had come to take care of His corpse saw Him; His closest disciples saw Him numerous times;

hundreds of others saw Him, ate with Him, touched Him; so that there can be no doubt that three days after Jesus had died, Jesus was alive.

Because Jesus is risen, God has this news of great joy for you: *The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord (Ro 6:23)*. In another place it says this, *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God (Ep 2:8)*.

That means, Dear Friends in Christ, you have Jesus. And when you have Jesus you have forgiveness, life, and salvation. You have all you need in Jesus.

Remember, no one knows God better than God so He sent the Holy Spirit to work faith in you so that you trust, rejoice, and find hope in Jesus. You can think of it this way: in a few short days, on the actual date of Reformation, the kids will dress up in their costumes and go trick-or-treating. No matter what costume or mask each child decides to wear, they all will have one thing in common – on their rounds for candy, each will hold a bag or plastic pumpkin to hold of their Trick-or-Treat goodies. Think of FAITH as that bag – it holds all of God's promises in Christ.

It is good for us to cherish that, because we must not forget that the devil prowls around like a roaring lion raising up any number of false preachers to offer us their lies; all to take us from Jesus. But, we have all God's good gifts in Christ and each week in worship services of His House, God puts those good gifts in our bag: forgiveness, salvation, joy, peace, patience, gentleness. So that in the course of our week and life, we can reach into our bag and use them. You sin and your conscience condemns you, you can reach in and pull of the forgiveness of sins. Death sends a cold chill down your spine, reach into your bag and pull out the life and

salvation you have in Him who is the Resurrection and the Life. The lies of the devil are tempting you to despair, pull out the joy you have in the salvation of the Babe of Bethlehem. Family strife tearing you apart, reach in and pull out the peace you have in the Prince of Peace. Another medical appointment? Another day in infirmity and weakness in your mortal body? Reach in and pull out the patience you have in your Lord Christ. Someone – particularly someone you love deeply – is unkind, cruel, downright mean to you, pull out that gentleness you have in Him who before His accusers was silent.

Dear Child of God: Rest and cherish this: No one knows God better than God. That's why He sent His Son Jesus to save you and messengers to proclaim the eternal Gospel.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

¹McCain, Paul Timothy et al., eds. Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions; A Reader's Edition of the Book of Concord. 1st ed. (St. Louis: Concordia, 2005), 390.