

Reformation Sunday
October 29, 2017
"In His Own Words"
College Lutheran Church Salem, VA

"Apart from the obvious banter, all the words spoken by "Luther" are quotations from his writings."

DR. HILL: PLEASE LISTEN TO THESE WORDS FROM ST. PAUL'S LETTER TO THE ROMANS, THE FIRST CHAPTER, (VERSES 16 AND 17):

I HAVE COMPLETE CONFIDENCE IN THE GOSPEL; IT IS GOD'S POWER TO SAVE ALL WHO BELIEVE, FIRST THE JEWS AND ALSO THE GENTILES. FOR THE GOSPEL REVEALS HOW GOD PUTS PEOPLE RIGHT WITH HIMSELF; IT IS THROUGH FAITH FROM BEGINNING TO END. AS THE SCRIPTURE SAYS: "THE PERSON WHO IS PUT RIGHT WITH GOD THROUGH FAITH SHALL LIVE."

IT WAS THIS PASSAGE THAT MARTIN LUTHER PONDERED IN HIS STUDY HIGH UP IN THE TOWER AT WITTENBERG UNIVERSITY OVER THE WEEKS AND MONTHS FOLLOWING THE EVENT OF THE NAILING OF HIS 95 THESES TO THE CHAPEL DOOR AT WITTENBERG... [hammering on the door] FROM THAT TOWER EXPERIENCE, LUTHER WRESTLED WITH THE MEANING OF GRACE AND FAITH AND THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD...[more hammering on the door] LATER HE WROTE OF THIS EXPERIENCE:

"...I HATED THOSE WORDS-THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD-WHICH I HAD BEEN TAUGHT TO UNDERSTAND AS THE ACTIVE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD WHO ONLY IS RIGHTEOUS AND PUNISHES THE UNRIGHTEOUS SINNER." [More pounding on the door] "WOULD SOMEONE PLEASE FIND OUT WHAT THAT HAMMERING IS ABOUT AND STOP IT!"

CONSIDER WITH ME FOR A MOMENT THE CORE OF THE REFORMATION MESSAGE...[more hammering...Luther enters hammer in hand, humming...climbs the steps lectern side and begins to cross the chancel, sees congregation and Dr. Hill's obvious aggravation]:

LUTHER: OH, ENTSCHULDIGEN SIE MIR, BITTE (Excuse me, please), I DID NOT KNOW THERE WAS WORSHIP HERE TODAY...BUT, I COMMEND YOU FOR GATHERING IN THE LORD'S HOUSE...I'LL BE OUT OF YOUR WAY IN NUR EINE MINUTE!

DR. HILL: WAIT...AREN'T YOU...NO, IT CAN'T BE!

LUTHER: YA, ES IST. ICH BIN LUTHER...DR. MARTIN LUTHER, PROFESSOR OF THEOLOGY AT WITTENBERG UNIVERSITY. UND I APOLOGIZE FOR THE INTERUPTION.

DR. HILL: [flustered]...DR. LUTHER, I...WE...WELL, IT'S A GREAT HONOR TO HAVE YOU HERE WITH US TODAY...A MAN OF YOUR ACADEMIC STANDING. I HAVE READ MANY OF YOUR BOOKS AND ARTICLES- IN FACT, I HAVE THE COMPLETE SET OF YOUR WORKS. [Luther interrupts]

LUTHER: THE COMPLETE SET, YOU SAY? OF MY WORKS. DAS GLAUBE ICH NICHT. I DON'T THINK SO.]

DR. HILL: WELL, IN ANY CASE, COULD YOU PLEASE STAY AND TALK WITH US?

LUTHER: JA, IF YOU WISH. [Dr. Hill indicates the pulpit. Luther hums "A Mighty Fortress" as he makes his way there.]

DR. HILL: DR. LUTHER, YOU, AH, YOU'RE HUMMING "A MIGHTY FORTRESS IS OUR GOD."

LUTHER: JA, IT'S A HYMN I'M WORKING ON, BUT I HAVEN'T NAMED IT YET. ICH DAS DENKEN, "VON GOTT IST WIE EIN GROSSES SCHLOSS!"

DR. HILL: "GOD IS LIKE A BIG CASTLE"? Mmmm..MAYBE YOU COULD KEEP WORKING ON THAT.

LUTHER: WELL, IF YOU HAVE ANY GOOD IDEAS FOR A NAME, LET ME KNOW."

DR. HILL: I'LL CERTAINLY DO THAT. ACTUALLY, IT'S AMAZING YOU HAVE TIME TO WRITE HYMNS! YOU MUST BE TERRIBLY BUSY IN YOUR MINISTRY...

LUTHER: ACH, YA, SICHER! UND I NEARLY NEEDED TWO COPYIST ODOR SECRETARIES. ALL DAY LONG UND I DO ALMOST NOTHING ELSE THAN WRITE LETTERS; THEREFORE, I AM SOMETIMES NOT AWARE OF WHETHER OR NOT I CONSTANTLY REPEAT MYSELF...

UND, SINCE YOU ASKED, LET ME JUST TELL YOU MY FEW LITTLE DUTIES THAT I HAVE:

I AM A PREACHER AT THE MONASTERY,

I AM A READER DURING MEALTIMES,

I AM ASKED DAILY TO PREACH IN THE CITY CHURCH,

I HAVE TO SUPERVISE THE STUDY OF NOVICES AND FRIARS,
I AM A VICAR,
I AM CARETAKER OF THE FISHPOND AT LITES-KOW,
[SOURCE OF INCOME FOR THE MONASTERY YOU SEE],
I REPRESENT THE PEOPLE OF HURTSBURG AT THE COURT IN TORGOW,
I LECTURE ON THE BIBLE-GALATIANS MOSTLY,
UND I AM ASSEMBLING MATERIAL FOR A COMMENTARY ON THE PSALMS...
I HARDLY HAVE ANY UNINTERRUPTED TIME
TO SAY HOURLY PRAYERS UND CELEBRATE MASS.

AND, BESIDES ALL THIS, WELL, THERE ARE MY OWN STRUGGLES WITH THE FLESH, THE WORLD UND
DER TEUFEL, THE DEVIL! SO, YOU SEE WHAT A LAZY MAN I AM!

DR. HILL: A LAZY MAN? I HARDLY THINK SO! YOU BROUGHT GREAT CHANGES TO THE CHURCH,
YOUR ARGUMENTS CHALLENGED THE POPE, YOUR WORDS CHANGED THE CHRISTIAN FAITH!

LUTHER: NO, NO, NEIN...NICHT *MY* WORDS, BUT *THE* WORD. WHILE I SLEPT OR DRANK WITTENBURG
BEER WITH MY FRIENDS, MELANCTHON UND AMSDORF, THE WORD SO GREATLY WEAKENED THE
PAPACY THAT NO PRINCE OR EMPEROR EVER INFLICTED SUCH LOSSES UPON IT. I DID NOTHING;
THE WORD DID EVERYTHING!

JA, OF COURSE, HAD I DESIRED TO FOMENT TROUBLE, I COULD HAVE BROUGHT GREAT BLOODSHED
UPON GERMANY; INDEED, I COULD HAVE STARTED SUCH A GAME THAT EVEN THE EMPEROR WOULD
NOT HAVE BEEN SAFE. BUT WHAT WOULD IT HAVE BEEN? MERE FOOL'S PLAY. I DID NOTHING. I LET
THE WORD DO ITS WORK.

DR. HILL: BUT YOU ARE A DOCTOR OF THEOLOGY; A PREACHER AT WITTENBURG, A CHAPLAIN AT A
PRESTIGIOUS UNIVERSITY, WHAT A SENSE OF ACCOMPLISHMENT YOU MUST HAVE!

LUTHER: HA! I HAVE NEVER WANTED TO DO IT, AND DO NOT WANT TO DO IT NOW. I WAS FORCED
UND DRIVEN INTO THIS POSITION IN THE FIRST PLACE BY THE POPE AND EMPORER, WHEN I HAD TO
BECOME A DOCTOR OF HOLY SCRIPTURE AGAINST MY WILL.

UND THEN, AS A DOCTOR IN A FREE UNIVERSITY, I BEGAN, AT THE COMMAND OF POPE AND EMPEROR, TO DO WHAT SUCH A DOCTOR IS SWORN TO DO: EXPOUNDING THE SCRIPTURE FOR ALL THE WORLD AND TEACHING EVERYBODY! BUT, ENOUGH ABOUT ME...WHO ARE YOU? THIS ISN'T WITTENBURG, IS IT?

DR. HILL: I AM DR. BILL HILL, A RETIRED PROFESSOR OF OUR ROANOKE COLLEGE. THIS IS A COLLEGE OF LUTHERAN CHURCH.

LUTHER: STOPPEN SIE RECHT DORT! DID YOU SAY THE LUTHERAN CHURCH?

DR. HILL: YES, THE LUTHERAN CHURCH. IT IS ONE THE LARGEST PROTESTANT DENOMINATIONS IN THE WORLD TODAY.

LUTHER: THE LUTHERAN CHURCH, YOU SAY? YOU CALL YOURSELVES..LUTHERAN?

DR. HILL: WELL, YES, WE DO. AS A MATTER OF FACT, WE CALL OURSELVES LUTHERAN AFTER YOUR...[Luther interrupts, angry]

LUTHER: I ASK THAT MEN MAKE NO REFERENCE TO MY NAME; LET THEM CALL THEMSELVES CHRISTIANS, NOT LUTHERANS! WAS IST LUTHER?! AFTERALL, THE TEACHING IS NOT MINE, NEITHER WAS I CRUCIFIED FOR ANYONE.

ST. PAUL IN FIRST CORINTHIANS WOULD NOT ALLOW CHRISTIANS TO CALL THEMSELVES PETRINE, AFTER HIS NAME, BUT CHRISTIAN!

HOW THEN SHOULD I, POOR STINKING MAGGOT-FODDER THAT I AM, COME TO HAVE MEN CALL THE CHILDREN OF CHRIST BY MY WRETCHED NAME?

NOT SO MY DEAR FRIEND; ABOLISH ALL PARTY NAMES AND CALL YOURSELVES CHRISTIAN, AFTER HIM WHOSE TEACHING WE HOLD. I NEITHER AM NOR WANT TO BE ANYONE'S MASTER. I HOLD, TOGETHER WITH THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH, THE ONE UNIVERSAL TEACHING OF CHRIST WHO IS OUR **ONLY MASTER**.

YOU WILL HAVE TO CHANGE THE NAME!

DR. HILL: WELL, I APOLOGIZE, I GUESS, FOR CALLING MYSELF LUTHERAN. BUT PERHAPS YOU WOULD BE WILLING TO STAY WITH US TO SHARE YOUR IDEAS ABOUT THE THEOLOGICAL

DISCUSSIONS OF OUR DAY: LIBERATION THEOLOGY, PERHAPS, OR PROCESS THEOLOGY OR THE THEOLOGY OF DEMOCRATIC CAPITALISM OR PERHAPS FEMINIST THEOLOGY OR MAYBE...[Luther interrupts]

LUTHER: WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?! THE PROPER SUBJECT OF THEOLOGY IS MAN GUILTY OF SIN UND CONDEMNED, UND GOD THE JUSTIFIER AND SAVIOR OF MAN THE SINNER.

WHATEVER IS ASKED OR DISCUSSED IN THEOLOGY OUTSIDE THIS SUBJECT IS **ERROR UND POISON!**

ALL SCRIPTURE POINTS TO THIS: THAT GOD COMMENDS HIS KINDNESS TO US AND IN HIS SON RESTORES TO RIGHTEOUSNESS AND LIFE THE NATURE THAT HAS FALLEN INTO SIN UND CONDEMNATION.

THE ISSUE HERE IS NOT THIS PHYSICAL LIFE, WHAT WE SHOULD EAT, WHAT WORK WE SHOULD UNDERTAKE, HOW WE SHOULD RULE OUR FAMIL, HOW WE SHOULD TILL THE SOIL... THE ISSUE HERE IS THE FUTURE AND ETERNAL LIFE: THE GOD WHO JUSTIFIES, REPAIRS AND MAKES ALIVE; NAND MAN, WHO FELL FROM RIGHTEOUSNESS AND LIFE INTO SIN AND ETERNAL DEATH.

DR. HILL: YOUR WORDS MAKE IT SOUND LIKE THE LIFE OF FAITH IS A *CONSTANT BATTLE*. ISN'T THAT A LITTLE TOO DRAMATIC...I MEAN WHERE IS THE TALK OF HEALING AND REDEMPTION AND THE FULFILLED LIFE OF FAITH?

LUTHER: MY DEAR FRIEND, WHEN CHRISTIANS ARE NOT DOING BATTLE WITH THE DEVIL..DAS IST NICHT EIN GUTES ZEICHEN, NOT A GOOD SIGN, FOR IT MEANS THAT THE DEVIL IS AT PEACE AND HAS HIS OWN WAY.

BUT, WHEN THE DEVIL RAGES AND HAS NO PEACE, IT IS A SIGN THAT HE, BEING UNDER ATTACK, SHALL BE CONQUERED, FOR IT IS CHRIST WHO IS ATTACKING HIS HOUSE. THEREFORE, WHOEVER DESIRES TO SEE THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH EXISTING IN QUIET PEACE, ENTIRELY WITHOUT CROSSES, WITHOUT HERESIES, AND WITHOUT FACTIONS, WILL NEVER SEE IT THUS, OR ELSE HE MUST VIEW THE FALSE CHURCH OF THE DEVIL AS THE REAL CHURCH.

DR. HILL: MANY PEOPLE WITHIN THE CHURCH TODAY WOULD SAY: "I KNOW THAT THERE IS SIN, BUT I AM NOT SUCH A BAD PERSON. I TREAT MY FAMILY WITH KINDNESS. SIN REALLY DOESN'T MEAN ALL THAT MUCH TODAY. WE EVEN CALL IT BY DIFFERENT NAMES: YOUTHFUL INDISCRETION, A MISTAKE IN JUDGEMENT, A CRIME OF PASSION, PLAUSIBLE DENIABILITY, HUMAN NATURE. WE THINK

THAT WE ARE RATHER SAFE FROM THE EVIL PARTS OF THE WORLD. WE HAVE A PLEASANT LIFE, GOOD HEALTH, NO PERSECUTION LIKE IN OTHER PARTS OF THE WORLD AND CHURCH IS A COMFORTABLE EXPERIENCE ON SUNDAY MORNING.

LUTHER: OH, ACH DU LIEBE ZEIT! MEIN GOTT IN HIMMEL! (Oh, my goodness. My God in heaven!) NOW, MY DEAR PROFESSOR, I AM LECTURING YOU AND ALL OF YOU AS WELL. LISTEN VOR-SICH-TIG, BITTE! THAT MEANS "LISTEN CAREFULLY, PLEASE!"

NOTHING IS SAFE WHERE EVERYTHING IS SAFE,
NOTHING SO SICK AS WHEN EVERYTHING IS HEALTHY.

THERE IS NO TEMPTATION WHEN ALL IS TEMPTATION, BECAUSE THE DEVIL FIGHTS NOT WITH PERSECUTION, BUT RATHER WITH SECURITY UND IDLENESS.

THEREFORE, WOE TO US WHO ARE SO SNATCHED AWAY BY PRESENT THINGS AND FOOLISHLY DO NOT SEE THE DEVIL'S TRAP!

DR. HILL: WELL, THEN, DR. LUTHER, WHAT WOULD YOU TEACH?

LUTHER: LEARN CHRIST UND HIM CRUCIFIED. LEARN TO PRAISE HIM, AND DISPAIRING OF YOURSELF, SAY:

"LORD JESUS, YOU ARE MY RIGHTEOUSNESS, JUST AS I AM YOUR SIN.

YOU HAVE TAKEN UPON YOURSELF WHAT IS MINE AND HAVE GIVEN TO ME WHAT IS YOURS.

YOU HAVE TAKEN UPON YOURSELF WHAT YOU WERE NOT UND HAVE GIVEN TO ME WHAT I WAS NOT.

BEWARE OF ASPIRING TO SUCH PURITY THAT YOU WILL NOT WISH TO BE LOOKED UPON AS A SINNER OR, TO BE ONE...FOR CHRIST DWELLS ONLY IN SINNERS.

DR. HILL: THEN WHAT SHOULD WE EXPECT OUR PASTORS TO *PREACH?*

LUTHER: THEY SHOULD BE *PREACHERS OF GRACE*, THEN LET THEM PREACH A TRUE AND NOT A FICTITIOUS GRACE. IF GRACE IS TRUE, YOU MUST BEAR A TRUE AND NOT A FICTITIOUS SIN. GOD DOES NOT SAVE PEOPLE WHO ARE ONLY FICTITIOUS SINNERS. BE A SINNER AND SIN BOLDLY, BUT BELIEVE AND REJOICE IN CHRIST EVEN MORE BOLDLY, FOR HE IS VICTORIOUS OVER SIN, DEATH AND THE WORLD.

DR. HILL: THEN HOW DOES ONE ACQUIRE THIS GRACE WHICH YOU SAY IS SO FREELY GIVEN?

LUTHER: GRACE IS FREELY GIVEN TO THE MOST UNDESERVING AND UNWORTHY. AND IT IS NOT OBTAINED BY ANY STRENUOUS EFFORTS, ENDEAVORS OR WORKS, EITHER GREAT OR SMALL, NOT EVEN BY THE EFFORTS OF THE BEST AND MOST HONORABLE MEN WHO HAVE SOUGHT AND FOLLOWED RIGHTEOUSNESS WITH A BURNING ZEAL. TO WANT TO MERIT GRACE BY WORKS WHICH PRECEDE FAITH IS TO WANT TO APPEASE GOD BY SINS, WHICH IS NOTHING BUT ADDING SINS TO SINS, LAUGHING AT GOD, AND PROVOKING HIS WRATH.

DR. HILL: DR LUTHER, YOU CERTAINLY TAKE AN UNCOMPROMISING STAND WHEN IT COMES TO SIN, THE GRACE OF GOD AND OUR SALVATION. THERE ARE OTHERS -GOOD PEOPLE-WHO SEE THINGS A LITTLE DIFFERENTLY. SHOULDN'T YOU BE A LITTLE MORE... FLEXIBLE?

LUTHER: UNLESS I AM CONVINCED BY THE TESTIMONY OF THE SCRIPTURE OR BY CLEAR REASON, I AM BOUND BY THE SCRIPTURES I HAVE QUOTED AND MY CONSCIENCE IS CAPTIVE TO THE WORD OF GOD. I CANNOT AND WILL NOT RETRACT ANYTHING, SINCE IT IS NEITHER SAFE NOR RIGHT TO GO AGAINST CONSCIENCE.

HIER STEHE ICH,
ICH KANN NICHTS ANDERES TUN,
SO HILF MIR GOTT.

[Luther exits]

DR. HILL: "HERE I STAND. I CANNOT DO OTHERWISE. MAY GOD HELP ME." WITH THOSE FINAL WORDS SPOKEN BEFORE CHARLES V, LUTHER WAS EXCOMMUNICATED AND BRANDED A HERETIC AND AN OUTLAW BY THE HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE.

ON THIS REFORMATION SUNDAY, SOME 500 YEARS LATER, WE CELEBRATE LUTHER'S UNDERSTANDING OF THE GOSPEL WHICH SERVED AS A CATALYST OF PROTESTANTISM THROUGHOUT EUROPE AND TODAY FAR BEYOND.

NOW WE INVITE YOU TO STAND TO SING THAT HYMN THAT LUTHER WAS FINALLY ABLE TO NAME.

"A MIGHTY FORTRESS IS OUR GOD."