

Sermon – 10-28-2018
Reformation Sunday – Isaiah 55
By
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Uh oh. It's this Lutheran church nerd's favorite holiday again. It's the day that we celebrate the beginning of the Reformation, when Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses, or statements for debate, to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany. That one small event touched off one of the largest sea changes to ever rock the church on earth. I've got a question to start off today: How many of you can even name one of those Theses? If you can, I applaud you. Most of you can't. I'll give you one, though. I'll give you the first one. The one that started it all. 1. Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, when He said "repent", willed that the whole life of believers should be repentance. The reference there is Matthew 4:13. The word had been translated for centuries as "do penance." Luther rediscovered that it was actually to be "repent always." So, the whole Reformation started, literally at its first point, over the Word. And the

conversations and debates about the Word have continued since. But instead of talking about the Word, at the start, at least, I want to give you the word.

John 8:31-36

This word describes what Jesus is doing through his life, death, and resurrection.

*****read*****

If there's one thing that I believe about the Scriptures, it's that reading them makes you want to read more of them, so we're going to read more of them.

Romans 3:19-28

This word describes how Jesus' life, death, and resurrection work for us.

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These words are important. These are the words that describe what Christ has done, and what it means for humanity. These words form the basis for everything that we do as Christians and as a congregation. But there is more to the conversation about the Word of Scripture than just talking about truth. Most often, when we talk about the Word, we settle into the "God said it, I believe it, that settles it" crowd. Now, I believe

that each of those statements is true. But I want you to notice something that is missing from each part of that statement. Motion. The verbs in that statement are things that you can do while not lifting a finger, or only moving very small muscles, in the case of "said". That statement implies, and often leads to, an inactive posture toward the Word of God.

The greatest example of this comes from a survey done about a year and a half ago by LifeWay Research. According to their research, the average American household has 3 Bibles. And yet, over half of Americans say they read the Bible little or not at all. Now, this data comes from Americans in general, and may not necessarily reflect Christians in specific, but I'd like you all to take a personal inventory in your head this morning. How many Bibles do you own? Make sure you count the one on your phone. Okay, now that you have that number, ask yourself this: When is the last time that I read the Scripture, that had nothing to do with worship? Not at Bible Study, not on a Sunday morning, but by yourself, without anyone telling you to do that right now? Some of you may be

embarrassed by your answer to that question. I know I am. Even me, someone who has devoted his life to this Word, has trouble with being active toward the Word.

And that is our problem. We don't want this word, especially if it means having to acquire it for ourselves. We'd rather be spoon-fed the Word, so we don't have to think about it, and it certainly doesn't have to do anything to change us, or even make us feel bad about ourselves. But here's the problem: the Word isn't here to make you feel bad about yourself; it's here to kill you outright. And there are plenty of Scriptures that tell us this exact thing:

- Hebrews 4:12: For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

- 1 Samuel 2:6: The Lord brings death and makes alive; he brings down to the grave and raises up.

- Colossians 2:11: In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self ruled by the

flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ...

- Romans 6:3: Don't you know that all of us who were baptized in Christ Jesus (Word!) were baptized into his death?

The Word wants you dead. Because it is only when you are dead, that it can make you alive again:

- 1 Peter 1:23: For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring Word of God.

- John 15:3: [Jesus said,] You are already clean because of the Word I have spoken to you.

- Psalm 119:114: You are my refuge and shield; I have put my hope in your Word.

- Hebrews 1:3a: The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.

So, let's have a breakdown of all the active things the Word does. The Word separates, judges, brings death, cuts off the flesh, joins to death, brings to life, grows life anew, cleanses, protects, sustains. That's a lot, and that's exactly what Isaiah told us.

Isaiah 55:1-11

I continue to tell you that God is consistent, throughout history, in how he deals with his people. Here's the latest example. The kicker is at the end.

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This Word that we are given is active. It does something. And it does something to you. It's not just sitting there on your shelf, waiting for you to assent to it, or to do something with it. It's moving whether you're moving or not. The Word has a purpose, has a reason for existing. Its purpose is to kill your flesh, and raise you to new life. It does this with two little words. These two little words are the difference between the Word being inert and the Word being active and alive. Those two little words? For you. That's what the Reformation brought us. You could have read the Scriptures until you were blue in the face. You could have known the original languages backwards and forwards, at the same time. You could agree that the Scriptures are absolutely true. But those two words are the ones that do the work, that cause the Word to kill and make alive. Christ needed to die for you, because your sins bring you to death. Christ needed to be raised for

you, because you needed to be raised and saved from that death. And this Word needs to be given to you, by the Scriptures themselves, by the preacher on Sunday, and by your brothers and sisters in Christ every day. This is the core of the Reformation: that the Word does its work on your heart, and the heart of every poor, miserable sinner gathered here. The Word slices into your heart, and shows you that everything, even your best stuff, is causing your death. But that death leads to life, because the death of Christ, who you are joined to by Word and Sacrament. And this is the Word that is given to you, that is applied to you, that is placed in you by the Holy Spirit. And this is the activity that we give thanks for on Reformation Sunday. AMEN.