

**October 24–25, 2009**

**Reformation  
Matthew 11:12-15**

**“The Kingdom Still Remaineth”**

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

I do not know what they will do in Wittenberg for Reformation. I doubt they will let the anniversary pass unnoticed. But Luther's faith is gone from that place. After four hundred and ninety-two years, dictators, swastikas, tanks, and guns, after that perversion a hammer and a sickle, all that is left is the inheritance of violence and the shallow allure of tourism. The faith is gone. The seat of the Reformation, where by pen and by speech Luther revealed God in His mercy and turned the hearts of the fathers to their children, where freedom and truth rang in purity, where God's Word and Sacrament were received anew by grace: Wittenberg is now a wasteland, all but devoid of faith. *Where are Luther's heirs?*

Sixty-five years ago Herman Sasse, a German by birth, exiled to Australia by the Church he served, thought that the Missouri Synod was the future. I suppose it was. But now it looks quite uncertain. And what if Missouri goes the way of all flesh. *What if she falls like Jerusalem, Rome, and Wittenberg before her? So what?* Do not be afraid. It is in God's hands. And the Reformation blooms again. Buds have broken through the snow in Siberia! There is a re-emerging Church, awaking from her slumber, in Latvia, in Lithuania, and in South Africa! *Who knows*

*where else?* The Word of God does not fail. It does not return empty. It never belonged to us by right. Luther's children, like Abraham's, are not those who share his blood, but those who share his faith. From Wittenberg to St. Louis to Kenya and Novosibirsk. If that be God's will, God be praised!

*But what of our children, trapped in this post-modern lie, in a Church as rife with corruption as medieval Rome? Must they move overseas to have the Truth? Not quite. But they must fight for it. They cannot rest in the false comfort and luxury of an institutional lie. They must grasp the Word of God and hold Him to it. They might limp away like Jacob, but not without a blessing. Let them make sacrifices for their church. Let them become missionaries and teachers who will not settle for lukewarm anesthesia, but who insist upon the Word of God in all its strict, unbending sternness and the full liberating sweetness of the Truth. Let them seek fellowship with fellow confessors around the globe and cherish the companionship that comes only from unity in the Word of God. Let them fight, hurt, and grow to know that nothing else in this world can be trusted, nothing else in this world lasts. For all things pass away with the exception of this: The Word of God made Flesh for our redemption!*

We've often said "**The Church is not built of mortar and stone.**" True enough, but neither is it built upon paper, logos, and slogans from headquarters. The Church is built upon the death of Jesus Christ. It is sustained in His resurrection. It is not found in corporate offices, radio programs, or tax shelters. It is found around the Altar of God's Body and Blood. There hearts are broken and rebound. Old men are drowned. New men arise. Sins are forgiven. The devil is defeated. Faith is born and lives.

It is written: **The prophets and the Law prophesied until John and if you are willing accept it, he is Elijah who is to come.** The Passover is complete. Our tears in Babylon have ended. The resurrected Temple abides in the new Jerusalem and we are a people who were no people. The gates of Hell cannot hold us. If this building crumbles, this synod falls, this country ceases, still Our God remains. Our salvation is secure. Our hope is not in Jerusalem, Rome, Wittenberg, or St. Louis. It is in Christ alone. His triumphal march through Hell is done. The demons know the truth.

Still, the kingdom of heaven, even the kingdom within you, suffers violence. And it hurts. But if there is no violence, no struggle, then there is no kingdom. And that just may be what history sees as the demise of the Church in America as she does not struggle. When Church and culture are indistinguishable, the devil has won.

The kingdom of heaven suffers violence and the violent take it by force. The suffering kingdom must be seized by violent faith: foolish, reckless faith like that of John in the desert speaking truth to power without fear, losing his head because he would not pretend that adultery was okay, because he would not tolerate the false doctrine of the Pharisees; foolish, reckless faith of pioneers who would not settle for an American gospel of prosperity but begged their brothers overseas to send them missionaries trained in the Scriptures; foolish, reckless faith of African Bishops who will not take the blood money of abortion and depravation but dare to speak the Truth from their poverty. This is your heritage. In Baptism God gives this violent, strident faith that risks all for Jesus Christ is Lord.

That is why I am not sad at the prospect that our children might have to rebuild this Church, make sacrifices, learn discipline, do the work of teachers and Pastors. If that is the case, it will be good for them. It will be good for us. And in this sense I am glad for the troubles in Missouri and the Church in America. For wherever the Gospel is preached it brings trouble. He did not come to bring peace, but a sword. When the fighting stops our churches become tourist attractions, nothing more than symbols of the past. But not yet! By Grace, not yet!! The warning is there in Jerusalem's rubble and Wittenberg's brochures. But yet, by Grace, our churches are not symbols of the past. They are icons of the future: a witness to the kingdom won, a promise of the kingdom to come.

What will happen on this earthly plane, I do not know. But I know that soon we will not care. We will be free at last of all politics, elections, synods, building and church repairs, homeland security and terrorism, of past sins and regrets, of fear and sadness. We will abide in our Father's home won by grace, born in love, raised to life because Jesus Christ is Lord.

Believe it for Christ's sake. In + Jesus' Name. Amen.