

October 28, 2018
Sermon for Reformation (Observed)
St Peter Lutheran Church
Bowie, TX
Larry Knobloch, Pastor
John 8:31-36 Acts 2:1-12

J.J.- Jesu Juva—Help me, Jesus

John 8:31–36 (ESV)

³¹ So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, ³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” ³³ They answered him, “We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, ‘You will become free?’” ³⁴ Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. ³⁵ The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. ³⁶ So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

Acts 2:1–12 (ESV)

¹ When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. ² And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³ And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. ⁴ And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. ⁵ Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. ⁶ And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. ⁷ And they were amazed and astonished, saying, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?” ⁸ And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? ⁹ Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, ¹¹ both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.” ¹² And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?”

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior,
Jesus Christ!

Amen.

Those of you who grew up with Luther's *Small Catechism* will recognize the question that is the title of this Reformation service. Especially those who had to memorize the catechism will smile to think about the often repeated catechetical refrain, "What does this mean?"

You know how it goes: We should fear and love God so that we ...

Or when we get to the First Article of the Apostle's Creed: I believe that God has made me and all creatures...

Or how about The Lord's Prayer? With these words God tenderly invites us to believe that He is our true Father and that we are His true children...

But "What Does This Mean" is more than just a refrain. The question bears witness to an attitude toward the study of God's Word: IT'S SUPPOSED TO MEAN SOMETHING.

Academically, if words or phrases—or whole concepts—are not understood, they don't do us any good. We should define them, let's explain, let's illustrate to get at the meaning.

Something as basic as praying to “Our Father who art in heaven”—What does this mean? I don’t know how you picture God, but the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther reminds us that Jesus taught us to approach God the way we would approach a parent—the way a beloved child would approach a concerned and loving parent. Dr. Luther says: “With boldness and confidence,”

“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor,” one of the Commandments directs us. What does that mean? Is it only something that happens in a courtroom? Martin Luther’s short answer describes a number of different ways one might lie about another person, or lie to another person, or otherwise damage another person’s reputation ... and another list of ways to keep the commandment—not just a matter of “You shall not” but then a question of “Then what shall I do?”

That too is part of “What does this mean?”

When we pray: “Deliver us from evil”, we need to define the statement. Actually it is a kind of laundry list—of various kinds of evil we might encounter, from the bad things that can happen to us to the malicious things people can do to one another ... ending with the most serious evil of all, that one might lose one’s faith in Jesus Christ and end up going to hell! It doesn’t get any worse than that, Luther says.

Meanwhile, for the article in the Creed that begins, “I believe in the Holy Spirit,” Luther points out that even believing in God—believing in Jesus Christ as your Savior—is not something we can do by ourselves. The Catechism teaches us: “I believe that by myself I cannot believe,”

But the Holy Spirit can work in me the faith I need, by providing the Word of God, for example—the good news about what Jesus has done for me by His suffering and death to give me something to believe in.

The point is: The Word of God is supposed to MEAN something. Not just phrases we repeat without thinking or routines we rattle through, but concepts to be studied, examined, compared, put to the test, practiced ... and UNDERSTOOD.

Luther came by this concern honestly, of course, living at a time in the Church's history when much of religious life was a matter of simply going through the right motions at the right time, mechanically.

Yet Luther insisted, it's supposed to MEAN something.

Specifically, it's supposed to mean something TO ME. Jesus Christ is not just a figure in history (or even theology), but "Jesus Christ is my Lord."

What does this mean? That He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature. That He has not only forgiven my sin but has even undone my death, whenever it occurs.

Baptism isn't just water—but water combines with God's Word at His command. Then it becomes not just water, but a great, life giving blessing that makes a difference in my life here on earth and better yet, eternally!

My baptism defines who I am as a child of God and offers me God's great and precious promises. And so does yours!

The Ten Commandments, then, are not just a list of dos and don'ts, but an explanation of God's good will for me as I live under God and among other people. He sets the boundaries and expects us to follow them fully, not just paying lip service to them or appearing that we are covering things.

It's the message God was trying to get across in Exodus when He instructed the Israelites to observe the Passover, not just an ancient ceremony, but one that MEANS something, that TEACHES me something, that defines my place in the family of those who are my brothers and sisters in the faith, with whom I walk together as we journey toward the goal God has in store for us.

The same is true, the catechism teaches us, of the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Sacraments of the Church—gifts of God, all of them, meant to make a difference, eventually an eternal difference.

It's an attitude that goes all the way back to the first Passover: "When somebody asks you, 'What does this mean?,' You have an answer, found in God's Word and at His Command, but more importantly, you have His Gospel, and this means, that in Christ, your sins are forgiven.

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus!

Amen.

S. D. G - Soli Deo Gloria

To God alone be glory

Sermon Outline

What Does This Mean

John 8:31-36 Acts 2:1-12

1. God's Word is supposed to mean something.
2. It's not just "You shall not" but also "What shall I do?"
3. The Word of God not just phrases we repeat or routines we shuffle through.