

FESTIVAL OF THE REFORMATION

1 Peter 1:24,25

“The Word of the Lord Remains Forever”

The other week when Pastor Boehringer and I were driving to Minnesota for the Reformation Lectures, a good song from the early nineties came on and I said, “I think I have this album.” And then I realized I had it, but I had it on cassette tape, and Pastor Boehringer got to sit through my cassette tape rant. Is there any worse investment than a cassette tape? At the time, they seemed like the pinnacle of technology. You could fast forward, rewind, even record on them. And then came CDs, and cassette tapes became the most annoying things ever as you sat there trying to wind the tape back into the cassette after it got unwound for the umpteenth time. I hate cassette tapes. I can barely even bring myself to listen to the ones I’ve bought over the years. The only thing that cheers me up a bit is knowing that some of you once bought a bunch of 8 tracks. What does it say about 8 tracks that they make cassette tapes look like a great idea.

We live in a work where little if anything remains, and where nothing remains forever. Even the CDs that made my now hated cassette tapes obsolete seem to be going the way of all flesh, as MP3s grow in popularity. Nothing lasts forever—well, almost nothing. *“All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls,”* St. Peter says, *“but the word of the Lord remains forever.”*

“The word.” St. Peter does not say “a word,” but *“the word.”* God’s words are to be taken as a whole. It is impossible to truly consider one word or one teaching of the Lord without placing it in the proper context of the other words and teachings of the Lord. That is why we don’t base church fellowship on one or two core teachings, but on all that the Lord has revealed to us in His Word. If He didn’t want us to take something seriously, He wouldn’t have revealed it.

In the November newsletter, there was an article on the Gutenberg printing press, which helped get copies of the Holy Scriptures into the hands of the people even in their own native tongues. Some of the early editions of the Bible, however, earned themselves unfortunate names and their printers a hefty fine when they gave the word of the Lord a little less attention than they should have. The *Black Bible* accidentally left the “not” out of the sixth commandment, so that it read, “Thou shalt commit adultery.” The *Fool Bible*, misprinted the first

verse of Psalm 14 as, “The fool hath said in his heart there is a God.” The *Sin on Bible*, mistakenly had Jesus commanding one man he had healed, not, “*Sin no more,*” but instead, “Sin on more.”

Context is crucial, and all of Scripture must be taken as a whole. One didn't have to compare these editions of the Bible to previous editions to spot the mistake. The man or woman schooled in the Scriptures would have caught it on their own, knowing that God would never speak in such a way, the same as they would be better prepared to catch the errors of those claiming to teach the word of the Lord. We have been given “*the word of the Lord,*” and that word is just as complete, sufficient, and whole as the Word of God Himself, Jesus Christ. The Bible is not a buffet. The Bible is one long letter, one grand painting, one great hymn, where each word, each brush stroke, each note in the melody is crucial.

The Reformation was all about what God has said. There were plenty at the time, from popes to peasants, eager to tell the world what God was supposedly saying through them, and there still are just as many puffed up and dumbed down windbags today, but the issue is not and never has been what God is saying through this or that man; the issue is what God has said, and God cannot lie, and He will never say something that contradicts what He has said before.

What has God said is to say: what do the Scriptures say? It is to say to every self-proclaimed authority: “Keep your papal bull. Keep your councils. Keep your conventions. Keep your warm feelings and what you think what you think is the Holy Spirit is whispering in your ear. Give me the Scriptures, and if you can't do that, and if what you claim God is saying contradicts that, well, go swim in the Titabawassee because it's full of the same garbage you are.”

Scripture is the best investment the soul can make. Everything else is just cassette tapes. That is what the Reformation said. That is what true heirs of the Reformation will say today. And none of this started with the Reformation. This is what the prophets said to the false-prophets, what Jesus said to the Pharisees, what the Apostles to the early heretics, and so on and so forth.

Sometimes people will ask me, “What does the Lutheran Church say about this?” or “What does the Lutheran Church say about this?” or “What do you say about this?” I know they mean the right thing, and I know they mean well, but I'm always tempted to say, “Nothing worthwhile.” I do not read the Bible as a Lutheran, or a Wisconsin Synod Lutheran, or as a Wisconsin Synod Lutheran

pastor. I am a Wisconsin Synod Lutheran pastor because I've read the Bible, read it again and again, and every time I read it I am convinced again that the Lutheran Church and, by God's grace, the Wisconsin Synod, has said and says what the Bible said and says. God didn't give us the Scriptures for you to listen to some blockhead instead, even if that blockhead wears an alb and stoles and prances about in the chancel.

At the end of the order of service in your worship folder you'll see the letters VDMA around a cross. I don't ever plan to get a tattoo, but if I did, that would be it, because as my skin wrinkled with age and was eaten by worms in death what that tattoo said would ring true as ever. VDMA is the first letters in Latin of the words of our verse: *"the word of the Lord remains forever."* Very early in the Reformation, it became a slogan and symbol for the Evangelical Lutheran Church. As many lost all they had, some even their lives, for their confession of the faith, they reminded themselves that everything this world can offer is perishable, except, that is, for the word of the Lord. How foolish they would have been to turn their back on that word to save their heads. Their heads, like my non-existent tat, would be worm food one day, but what they did with that word of the Lord would decide what they would be in the Resurrection, that is, saved or damned.

In an internet age where we know everything about nothing and nothing about everything, the same is true. That word is everything. Know it or know nothing at all. Whatever temptation may promise you, whatever may call out for your time and attention, whatever may seem a better investment than the Scriptures, it is all hogwash. Let it go swim in the Titabawassee. *"The word of the Lord,"* and only the word of the Lord, *"remains forever."* And that word, St. Peter says, *"is the good news that was preached to you."*

That word remains because that word gives you Christ your Savior, crucified for your sin and risen for your justification, working through the waters of Baptism, present with His true Body and Blood in the Sacrament of the Altar, and speaking through the Scriptures and in the Absolution. If you have taken that word for granted, if you have carelessly listened to it, if you have been quick to turn your back on it when your flesh or the *Sin Bibles* or the *Fool Bibles* or the *Black Bibles* of life promised something more in line with your sinful desires, confess your sin and hear that same word with joy and conviction. *"The word of*

the Lord remains forever... and this word is the good news that was preached to you." And there's not a single typo in that verse.

In Christ you are forgiven. In Christ today is your tomorrow, your opportunity to treasure that which truly remains for all that it is worth, which is everything. Everything else is a compost heap of grass and withered flowers, 8 tracks and cassette tapes. You wouldn't give that to your girlfriend, and God wouldn't give that to you. No, *"the word of the Lord remains forever."* Amen.