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St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY

The Festival of the Reformation

October 31, 2021

Text: Revelation 14:6–7

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The context surrounding the first reading from Revelation 14 is the Church surrounded by conflict. Revelation 13 describes a hideous beast arising from the sea who has authority to wage war against the saints and to conquer them (vs. 7). This beast represents all political authority which purposefully stands against Christ and His Church. The early Christians reading and hearing the message of John's Revelation would immediately associate this beast with the Roman Caesars. By this time in history, they were starting to persecute the Christian Church. And in some parts of the Roman Empire, they were starting to declare themselves to be divine. Nero did both.

And yet Revelation 13 goes on to describe a second beast. The first arose from the sea but this second beast arose from the earth. He performs signs and wonders, calling down fire from heaven. And he deceives people into worshiping the first beast. The second beast represents all false prophets and teachers who seek to destroy the Church from the inside. They lead God's people away from the true worship of Christ by polluting and corrupting the gospel of the free forgiveness of sins and new life received by grace through faith in Jesus. The apostle Paul had to contend with false teachers; the NT epistle give some insight into those struggles. Earlier in the book of Revelation, the apostle John warned against the corrupting doctrines of the Nicolaitans as well as a false prophetess he called Jezebel; she was leading Christians back into the worship of idols in the name of Jesus! Taken together, the two beasts of Revelation 13 hold authority over all the earth, land and sea.

The focus shifts in Revelation 14 to the Church in all of her glorious purity and beauty. She is described as the 144,000 who have God the Father's name written on their foreheads. They are the baptized, the redeemed of the earth (vs. 3). Vs. 4–5 declare, "It is these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins. It is these who follow the Lamb wherever he goes. These have been redeemed from mankind as firstfruits for God and the Lamb, and in their mouth no lie was found, for they are blameless." The virginal purity used here to describe the Church refers to

their refuse to commit fornication with the two beasts described in Revelation 13. For the powers arrayed against the Church constantly seek to turn our love and devotion away from the Lord Jesus Christ and onto the false doctrines and ideologies of man, of political powers, of false religions, and corrupting vanities. We ought not be surprised by the various afflictions and struggles that Christians and the Christian Church face. God's Word has already prepared us. And we shall prevail through Christ.

With this context in mind, we hear in Revelation 14:6 the glorious revelation of the angelic proclamation of "an eternal gospel" given "to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people." Though the powers of hell and earth stand against God and His kingdom, the eternal Gospel goes forth unstoppably into the world. The gates of hell shall not prevail against the Church of the Lord Jesus. The 144,000, the number used in Revelation to describe the perfection of the Church born of men, women, and children from all nations, languages, tribes, and culture, hear the eternal Gospel and believe unto salvation, in spite of the two beasts and their demonic deceptions. Jews and Gentiles from all times and places come together confessing "one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all" (Eph. 4:4–6).

The Gospel is the message of God's eternal love most clearly and beautifully revealed in the life, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. It's eternal, forever established even before the creation of the world. Revelation 13:8 declares that Jesus is the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. God's redemptive love seen in Jesus is not something God came up with as some kind of reaction to man's sin. God's love is always eternal. As the psalmists repeatedly sing, "the steadfast love of the Lord endures forever."

For this message is the proclamation that the God "who is love" loves the world regardless of her sins and failures. God loves to such perfection that the Father willingly gives His Son, His only begotten and beloved Son, to be the world's Savior; the Father knew the heavy price His Son would pay and He gives in love nonetheless. The Son loves this world with such devotion that He joyfully became man in order to suffer, die, and rise again from the dead to redeem mankind from sin, misery, and eternal judgment. The Holy Spirit loves with unswerving faithfulness that He became the power and agency by which the Son became man; and the Holy Spirit brings the merits and saving grace of Jesus to the people of the world so that they believe in Jesus. God the Holy Trinity is love. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit loving each other in

Trinitarian perfection and God loving the world. The eternal gospel is the message that God is love. And His love is most clearly seen and experienced through the life, passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

What is celebrated here this Sunday morning and every Sunday morning is never bound by our time, place, and history. The Gospel of Jesus is the eternal, universal message that God the Holy Trinity loves in perfection, without shadow of turning. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation for all who believe. Adam and Eve believed the same Gospel that we do. As did Abraham and Sarah, Moses, Ruth, Samuel, David, Hezekiah, and all the faithful kings of old; Elijah and Elisha and all the prophets, the faithful remnant of Israel that was constantly harassed by pagan unbelievers as well as apostatizing Jews. John the Baptist and the apostles of our Lord and the early Christians believed the same eternal gospel that we believe today.

This Gospel is passed down from generation to generation. Children are baptized and receive the love of God in Christ. They grow, marry, have children whom they too baptize and nurture in God's love. And so the eternal Gospel permeates throughout human history and myriads and myriads of lives. King David wrote in Psalm 62:5, God "has given me the heritage of those who fear your name." We 21<sup>st</sup> century Christians have received that godly heritage from our forefathers and foremothers. From the likes of CFW Walther, Rosa Parks, Wilhelm Lohe, Chemnitz, Luther, Anselm, Augustine, Monica his mother, Perpetua and Felicitas, early Christian women martyred for the faith of Jesus, Irenaeus, Polycarp, and the entire cloud of witnesses described in Hebrews 12. Our hymns and liturgies, our art and literature, the prayers and the pious disciplines of the Church, our entire life of worship and devotion are part and parcel of this godly heritage. The myriads and myriads of saints, past and present, have all participated in the angelic proclamation of God's eternal gospel. Members of our church come and go as the circumstances of life direct; we live and we die. Regardless of all that, we remain united together in Christ Jesus through His eternal Gospel. The Gospel we celebrate here is not bound by time, place, and history. Instead, the Gospel defines and gives purpose to our time, place, and history.

You, dear saints of God, you are the redeemed of the earth, made holy and blameless by the precious, eternal Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Through faith in Jesus, your sins are forgiven, you stand justified in the Father's sight, and you are living temples of the Holy Spirit. The heritage of those who fear the name of the Lord remains intact and complete for this assembly is filled with blood-bought, holy Christians.

Yes, there is conflict in your lives. The evil forces of the two beasts described in Revelation 13 remain active and will be so unto the time. External pressures from the world seek to destroy and silence the Christian faith. Internal enemies, false teachers seek to corrupt the eternal gospel by turning our hearts to false belief and to an impure religion of self-chosen works void of the cleansing blood of Jesus. Both beasts seek to destroy true faith and replace it with false hope and godless living. Stand firm in the eternal gospel, dear saints of God. The angelic message of the eternal gospel continued into vs. 7, “Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come, and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water.” The Lord Jesus has told that He is coming soon. The hour of judgment is upon us. This is good news of us Christians. The devil, the powers of this world, and the corruptions of our sinful flesh cannot and will not take our attention away from Jesus and His eternal Gospel. Though the earth give way, we Christians stand in prayer and faith. The Word of the Lord endures forever.

You are the beloved of the Lord, the recipients of the godly heritage of those who fear the name of the Lord. You are the Church, the redeemed of all the earth. God’s love and grace be with you all ...

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.