

“STANDING FOR WHAT MATTERS”

“Jesus said, ‘If you hold to My teaching, you are truly My disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth shall set you free.’ John 8:31-32

“Here I stand; I can do no other. God help me. Amen.” Those words of Martin Luther as he stood before the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire still resound through the ages. In this “Battle for the Gospel,” Luther was required to retract all his writings yet, unless he could be convinced by Scripture and reason that he was wrong, he refused to do so.

What we fail to understand is that this refusal wasn’t just show-boating or stubbornness. It was life or death. To refuse to retract and be obedient to his superiors, Luther faced the death penalty. Others before him had been tortured and put to death for similar things, so this was a real danger. It was only by God’s gracious providence and protection that Luther survived and the clear Gospel of “Salvation by grace through faith alone in Jesus Christ” was allowed to shine forth brightly again.

So, when I think about the courage and tenacity shown by Luther and other countless Christians through the ages who were willing to risk all to remain faithful to God and His Word, I wonder about our own situation here at Our Savior. Are we so comfortable with both our outward connection to the church, and the freedoms we enjoy in our country, that we rarely feel the necessity of regularly hearing God’s Word and living up to the challenge of being His faithful Christians in the world?

What I mean is, we have over seven hundred people who are members of our congregation. While taking into consideration those away at college, in the military, or are home bound and institutionalized, there are still more than a hundred of our folks who haven’t stepped foot in church for years. And of those who would be considered “good members,” we still average only about 230-250 in church on any given weekend, which is less than half of those who could be here.

I understand the busyness of life today. I understand the competing demands made upon our folks. I sympathize with the health and job issues many are experiencing. But I am puzzled, both by those who are here faithfully only when they have a duty to perform at church, and by those who could be here each week but aren’t. Why is that? I am curious, and would really like to know.

Has church become just one more obligation, among many, placed on us? Are we so involved in the daily grind of this world that we have too little energy left over to regularly attend to that which prepares us for “the life of the world to come?” Have we forgotten (or worse) the vows we made to God and before the congregation that we would “hear the Word of God and receive the Lord’s Supper faithfully” and “continue steadfast in this confession and Church and suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it?”

Perhaps we didn’t take those vows seriously back then, but God did. He took them just as seriously as the vow He made to us – to “suffer all, even death” to redeem us from sin and death and reconcile us to Himself through Christ. Church is not one more duty we perform for God, but is a thankful receiving of the gifts and service He gives, and does for us in Christ.

Through these Spirit given gifts in Christ regularly received, God gives us the strength to resist the devil, the world and our sinful flesh and, as His Christians, to boldly be able to say, with Luther: “Here I stand; I can do no other. God help me. Amen.”

God bless you,
Pastor Lueke