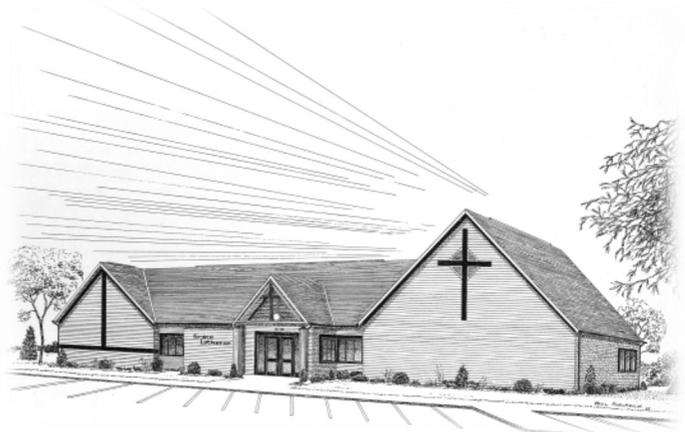




The First Sunday of End Time—Reformation Sunday
November 2, 2014
Pastor Daniel Naumann
Psalm 31:1-5
RESCUED! REDEEMED! RIGHTEOUS!



Have you ever been plagued by a terribly troubled conscience? It's that state of mind that brings us to our knees with a sickness in our stomachs that feels an awful lot like the flu. I'm not talking about simply feeling bad or feeling guilty about something you've done. We've all certainly been there. But have you ever felt so guilty or so bad about

what you've done that you were physically ill—that it drove you to confess what you did just because of conscience? There are some people who have a sharper conscience than others. You can even sharpen your conscience over time, or in fact dull your conscience over time. But pangs of guilt can really drive us to a terrible place of torment.

This is where Martin Luther found himself night after long and lonely night as a young monk. Martin Luther was plagued by a terribly troubled conscience. His conscience drove him even to the point of physically punishing his body to teach himself not to do wrong things, not even to think wrong thoughts, lest the judging God of his mind punish him eternally. You see, that's who God was to Martin Luther. That's the only God he knew, the stern-faced judge ready to punish any and every sinner who did not live perfectly up to the standard of perfection that he himself set. "Be holy, as I the Lord your God am holy." Martin Luther tried to do just that day after day, but even living among the very best in society as a monk, even living apart from most temptations in the world as he lived in a cloister, even there he was not able to live as he knew full well God's law expected him to live. And his conscience plagued him for it.

As our opening commemoration shows, Martin Luther knew the passages that talked about God's righteousness, but in those passages he saw only the

righteousness that God expected from him. In those passages he saw only the righteousness in God that would drive God to punish all who were not righteous as he expected. Martin Luther was plagued with a troubled conscience, plagued by his sin, and plagued by Satan himself. Martin Luther needed rescuing.

So to the Scriptures Luther went, driven there by his conscience, searching for rescue. And he found there another soul like his. Luther found a man by the name of David, who was also plagued by a troubled conscience. King David also had a sharp conscience that drove him always to be aware of what God demands and of the righteousness that God expected of him. This is one of the reasons why Scripture refers to King David as "the man after God's own heart." David had a deep recognition of his sin and a deep recognition of what he deserved for such sin. He also had a deep recognition of what God expected of him. This is why when faced with situations where most of us would have taken the easy way out, we see in David an example of immense good. Yet David never relied on his own righteousness. His Psalms attest to that very fact.

It was one of the Psalms written by this troubled conscience that Martin Luther found so significant. Psalm 31 is a Psalm of rescue for a troubled conscience. There in that Psalm Martin Luther found the answer he was seeking. "In you, O LORD, I have taken refuge; let me never be put to shame; deliver me in your righteousness. Turn your ear to me, come quickly to my rescue; be my rock of refuge, a strong fortress to save me. Since you are my rock and my fortress, for the sake of your name lead and guide me. Free me from the trap that is set for me, for you are my refuge. Into your hands I commit my spirit; redeem me, O LORD, the God of truth." When Luther read the beginning of this Psalm, like David when he wrote it, and like us today, we see a God who is entirely active when it comes to taking away our sin, and we see man entirely passive because man cannot do anything to become righteous like God expects.

You see, Luther's troubled conscience showed him

that fact above all else. The more Martin Luther tried to become righteous or tried to punish himself to make up for sin—the more he tried to do what God expected him to do—the more he realized that he simply could never do it. The same truth is found in David’s Psalms. Never does David speak as though he can earn God’s forgiveness or earn God’s righteousness; but he, like Luther, depends completely on God for true righteousness, for rescue, and for redemption.

It is this same truth that we ought to see as well when we look to the pages of Scripture for the righteousness of God. The words that jump out at us from this Psalm are words like *refuge*, *deliverance*, *rescue*, *fortress*, and *redeem*. In those words we see a picture, a violent picture. We all, Martin Luther and King David included, have a natural inclination to rely on ourselves for salvation. We feel as though we can earn it, or as though we can live up to God’s standards, but in reality all we do is diminish God’s standards. Sometimes it takes a troubled and plagued and razor-sharp conscience to drive us to realize that if we hold God’s standard of perfection where it should be then there is never any way at all that any of us could ever live up to his perfect standard. We try so hard to do so, but we cannot. We need rescuing. We need deliverance. We need redemption. Those words paint a picture for us that can be difficult to look at. Sometimes God uses a sharp and burdened conscience to show us exactly the same realization that both Luther and David had—we can’t depend on ourselves. The more we try to live up to God’s standards, the more we realize exactly what Paul wrote in Galatians when he said, “All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.’” (Galatians 3:10). No matter how hard we try we cannot live up to God’s standard. We are left with our sin standing condemned and worthy of hell. We need saving. We need rescuing. We need redemption. We need God to give us the righteousness that he requires.

Read Psalm 31 again and what do you find there? “In you, O LORD, I have taken refuge; let me never be put to shame; deliver me in your righteousness. Turn your ear to me, come quickly to my rescue; be my rock of refuge, a strong fortress to save me. Since you are my rock and my fortress, for the sake of your name lead and guide me. Free me from the trap that is set for me, for you are my refuge. Into your hands I commit my spirit; redeem

me, O LORD, the God of truth.” In those verses you see David, that troubled conscience, call to God for help and you see God doing all the rescuing and saving and redeeming.

Oh the beautiful expressions in this Psalm! It’s no wonder that they had such a strong affect on Luther when he read them. “Let me never be put to shame,” literally says, “I will not be shamed into eternity.” In other words, when God saves us he does it completely so that when we stand before him in heaven and in eternity we will not be shamed by our sin but we will be forgiven and welcomed into heaven because of his perfection. “Since you are my rock and my fortress, for the sake of your name lead and guide me.” This is who God is, he is the God who leads us into rescue, the God who guides us into perfection, the God who saves us by the blood of his Son. “Into your hands I commit my spirit; redeem me, O LORD, the God of truth.” An even better translation of



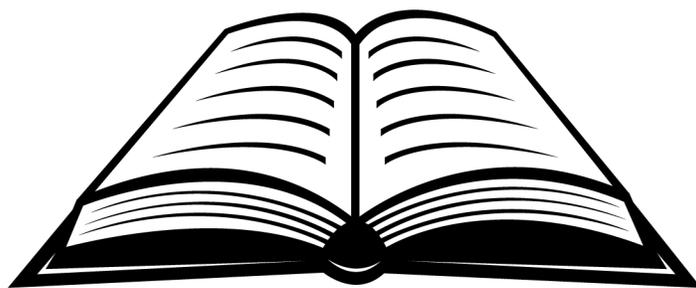
the last line is that “you have redeemed me, O LORD, the God of truth.” God has rescued me like a prisoner of war and a prisoner of sin, rescued from the clutches of the enemy. God has redeemed me like a lost treasure rediscovered and paid for a second time so that we could be his very own children. God has made me righteous like a perfect saint standing in his presence as holy and perfect in his sight not by what I have done but simply because of what he has done for me through Christ.

This is the saving that King David knew so well. When David’s conscience troubled him he was driven back to his God where he wrote again and again about the truth that God forgave his sin and remembers it no more. This is the saving that Martin Luther rediscovered at the Reformation. It was not a new discovery of some new teaching that had never been revealed before, but simply an unveiling of the truth of God’s Word that was hidden for centuries. Martin Luther found on the pages of Scripture the same comfort that comes to all of God’s people in times of a troubled conscience: the comfort of the truth of God’s rescue and redemption that comes only through Jesus Christ. It is this very same saving that you and I know so well and hear again every time we come back to God’s Word.

Today is Reformation Sunday, and it is the third time that I as a pastor have had the privilege of preparing a service for you on Reformation Sunday. In each of those three services I have used an alternate beginning to the service called the Commemoration. It’s a beginning that highlights Martin Luther’s Tower Experience, where he

writes about his personal struggle over guilt and his joy after seeing the truth of the gospel in the Scriptures. Every time I print this bulletin and prepare the service I ask myself, “Do we highlight Luther too much, so much that we have stopped highlighting Christ?” I think some would accuse Lutherans of that. They might call it “hero worship,” suggesting that we put Martin Luther on a pedestal as this great, indelible figure that is essential to our faith and to our salvation. But the reality of it is really quite stunning. You see, as you read through Luther’s tower experience and you read about the events of his life, what you find is not a man who wanted a church named after him or a movement started that place him on a pedestal above all others never to be removed. What you find there is a troubled soul—troubled by his sin. What you find in Martin Luther is the same that you find in us all—sinners looking for forgiveness and salvation. And then you see the gospel work on this troubled soul the same way that it works on us. It saves! It forgives! It redeems! It rescues! This is what Reformation Sunday is all about. It’s about the gospel, about forgiveness, and about God stopping at nothing to make sure that it is proclaimed to us even to the end, just as he promised. Amen.

If you continue
IN MY WORD



you are truly
MY DISCIPLES