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The Reformation of the Church

Stand Firm and Proclaim the Gospel

Throughout the history of the Christian Church, the forces of evil have hindered and harmed the proclamation of the gospel. In his mercy, God has raised up men and women who have defended the truth and turned back the attacks of the devil. Each year Lutherans remember these champions of every age, especially those who served at the time of the Lutheran Reformation. Today we thank God for the reformers and pray that people of our generation will continue to stand firm in the truth of God's Word.

Sermon
Revelation 14:6-7
Watch for the Angel Who Hurries the End

Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language, and people. He said in a loud voice, “Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water.”

Introduction – I kind of like it where I am. I like the work I'm doing. I like the house and the city where I live. I like spending time with my wife and playing with my grandchildren. I'm pretty sure you all feel about the same. We kind of like it here.

But I know, and you know, too, that there's something better coming. We believe that heaven is coming, and we are very sure that we will like it there more than we like it here. We suspect that we will go to heaven at the moment we die; that's the way almost everyone has gone to heaven in the past. Going to heaven when we die is a good deal for us, absolutely, but it's not so good for the people who are still here. The people who are still here will grieve for us, but that won't be the worst of it. The people who are still here will have to endure sickness, they'll get injured in accidents, they'll have to live through bad economic times. But that's won't be the worst of it. They'll have to resist the devil's temptations, they'll have to deal with false teachers who lure people away from God, they'll have to watch society sink into confusion and chaos. So what we're really looking forward to, what all believers are really looking forward to, the thing that is really better than what we have here, is for Jesus to come again at the end of time. When Jesus comes again at the end of time, our bodies will rise from their graves and everything that's bad on earth will be done. When Jesus comes again, all believers, those who died and those who are still alive, will live forever in the palaces and mansions of heaven. **And God will wipe away all their tears from their eyes.** We're going to really like it there!

Jesus talked a lot about the end of time during his ministry. That's what he was doing in the Gospel for today. It was four days before Good Friday and Jesus was talking about the times before the end of time. They would be bad times. You heard his warnings as he urged his followers to be on guard. But then Jesus said something very significant. He said, **And the gospel must first be preached to all nations.** Matthew remembers the same thing: **And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.** Jesus never said when the Last Day would come, but he did say that the end of time would not come until the gospel had been preached to all nations.

And that brings us to Reformation Day. As St. John looked ahead to the future of the Christian Church in his Revelation, he could see how Jesus planned to preach the gospel to all nations: **Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language, and people.** Here's the point: If Jesus' return at the end of time is the best thing we can imagine, and if his return won't happen until the gospel is preached to all nations then we need to:

Watch for the Angel Who Hurries the End

1. Those of you who studied Revelation with me last year remember that John wrote in picture language. So this angel is actually a messenger and this is not just one messenger but all the messengers God sent to proclaim the good news. So the apostles were messengers and so were the church fathers of the early church and so were the missionaries who traveled around the world. The Lutheran Church has always considered Martin Luther to be one of these angels with the everlasting gospel. At the time of the Reformation Lutherans were pretty convinced this passage was a direct reference to Martin Luther. That's pushing it, but this reading from Revelation 14 has been read in Lutheran churches on Reformation Day for over 400 years.

God chose the nation of Israel to be his special people, but God always intended that all people should hear and believe the good news. David wrote in Psalm 98: **Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples.** Jesus told his followers to be his **witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and in Samaria and to the ends of the earth.** Jesus appointed Paul to be the special missionary to the Gentiles. Christian churches all over the world put up statues and plaques of the missionaries who brought the gospel to their cities and countries. Martin Luther was hardly a world traveler, but his translation of the Bible brought the Scriptures to people all over Germany and the printing press carried his writings all over Europe. The messengers with the eternal gospel have been plenty busy for two thousand years.

Eventually, those messengers also found you or your parents or your grandparents. In some little village in Germany or near some farm in Mequon, a messenger with the eternal gospel preached that Jesus Christ gave his life and death to take their sins away. He preached in farmhouses or in churches made of logs. And then a messenger came into your life. He poured water over your head and brought you out of the grip of Satan into the family of God. He confirmed you or instructed you so that you could resist the devil's temptations. He gave you the body and blood of Jesus in Holy Communion to forgive your sins. And as he preached the gospel to you, messengers like him were doing the same in Japan and Nigeria and Hong Kong. Without these messengers and the gospel they carried, you and I would be just as damned as any heathen on earth. But through that messenger and by his message we join with people from every nation, tribe, language, and people to believe the everlasting gospel of Jesus. When Jesus comes again, we will be with him, body and soul, in the enormous crowd that stands around the throne of God. So watch for this angel who proclaims the gospel to all nations and hurries the end. The more he preaches and the more people he preaches to, the closer we get to the coming of Christ. Because before Christ returns, **the gospel must be preached to all nations.**

2. If you're watching for this angel, don't be looking for a cute little cherub or even a kindly old man with a black robe and a smiling face. This messenger is serious. **He said in a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water."** Don't be deceived, he means to say, God is not mocked. God doesn't fool around with sin. God would be right if he sent the whole sinful world packing into oblivion. But God tempered his right with his love. He sent a Savior to live and die in our place. His Spirit unites us to his Son by faith and creates and sustains that faith with his Word and sacraments. And the messenger with the eternal gospel says to us: Don't take this lightly! He says **fear God** with a respect that comes from faith. He says, **Give glory to God** and not to yourselves. He says, **Worship God** who created all the things you consider so important. There is an urgency here as the messenger speaks to every nation, tribe, language, and people—and as he speaks to us. He is urging us not to be careless and lazy about hearing the Word and receiving the sacrament. He is urging us to speak to our children and grandchildren about Jesus and his love. He is urging us to put prosperity and pleasure in their proper perspective in our lives. This messenger and every faithful messenger of the gospel urges us to repent of our sins and to trust in his Son so that we will be able to stand with the multitudes who enter the gates of paradise on the Last Day. Watch for this angel who implores all nations to repent and believe. The more he preaches and

the more people he preaches to, the closer we get to the coming of Christ. Because before Christ returns, **the gospel must be preached to all nations.**

Watch for these messengers of the gospel and then support them. Mary and Martha supported Jesus with food and shelter. The congregation in Philippi supported St. Paul on his journeys. Frederick the Wise, Luther's prince, supported and protected Luther against papal power. The task of proclaiming the gospel and urging people to repent and believe is not only the task of the messengers. In every age, faithful men and women in Christian churches have supported the work of missions. This is your task, too. You can become more interested in the work of the seminary which, after all, exists in your own city. You can bring generous offerings to our synod which sends missionaries around the globe. You can seek more effective ways for the ministry at Trinity/St. Johns to communicate the gospel in your city and neighborhoods. You may not be the messenger, but you have believed the message. And that's what leads you to pray and work that the gospel will be proclaimed to every nation, tribe, language, and people.

The gospel of the kingdom must be preached in the whole world, and then the end will come. That's what Jesus said. And if we want the end to come soon—and we surely do—then we must watch for the messengers of the everlasting gospel. By their work they hurry us all to the end of time. And so we pray, **Come quickly, Lord Jesus.** But we also say:

If I cannot be a watchman standing high on Zion's walls,
Pointing out the path to heaven, offering life and peace to all,
With my prayers and with my offerings I can do what God demands;
I can be like faithful Aaron, holding up the prophet's hands. Amen.