

Sermon for the Feast of the Reformation

'Come, behold the works of the Lord, how he has brought desolations on the earth.'

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It is generally considered improper to talk politics in Church, and for very good reason. Christ declared *His kingdom is not of this world*. Nor does it care for this world, or perhaps it is better to say, nor does it care for the powers of this world, nor its mighty men, its leaders and rulers and gods, for *the Lord is a God above all gods*.

Yet I will briefly talk politics.

Great and grave decisions are being made in this and every nation about the most dire events since the beginning of this century. Political actors and demagogues and concerned citizens from both sides cry out that if one false move is made, World War III, or genocide, or environmental collapse is at hand. Some nations fight for their independence, others for their existence, and others for their power.

Elections too draw near, in but a year. We hear that if one candidate wins, that our 'democracy will die in darkness,' and if the other wins, we will begin our slide into a communist dictatorship.

We watch the news with great concern, become angry with those with whom we disagree, grit our teeth at family members who voted for a different candidate. Perhaps we don't even invite them to Thanksgiving dinner.

But I tell you, though we must fulfill our vocation as good citizens, and vote wisely, and exercise our sovereignty in this Republic as benevolently as possible, out of love for our neighbor; this nation, these United States; these too shall *totter and fall*. For the Lord *breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the chariot*

with fire.

Indeed, all the might of nations, both good and evil, all come to an end, for God shall sustain nothing forever, no country or kingdom, save His Church, which alone is eternal, for it is His own body; the body of the God that *is and was and is to come.*

For nothing made by man can last; *'all men are like grass, and all their glory as the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall.'* And *'every work of man shall be brought to ash.'*

The kings of Egypt, the Pharaohs, thought their kingdom everlasting, and even crowned their rulers as undying gods; yet the Lord brought upon them plague and affliction, invasion, and finally subjection to a foreign people. And nothing remains of their everlasting kingdom but the wind-torn stone of their edifices and forsaken idols.

The Romans attempted to forge an *imperium sine fine*, an 'empire without end.' And yet, apart from a few phrases of Latin preserved in the books of Lawyers and thrown about by academics, their empire crumbled beneath the hand of a barbaric people.

It was said that the 'sun never set on the British Empire'. Now it sets upon it daily, for it is nothing more than another Island lost in a sea. Indeed, the sun of power has set upon it forever, and there shall be no dawn.

Then it was thought that through the machinations of a Red Russia, a universal utopia would be brought to the entire world, as soon as the lovers of money were abolished. Now that utopia's last testament resides in the poisoned livers of ten million true believers who, having seen their dreams die in the nightmare of Soviet Marxism, seek to drown their nightmares in the dreamless sleep of vodka.

What then of America? Love your country; love your countrymen, but know, you who are Christians, that a prophet of our people spoke rightly when he pronounced that 'this too shall pass.' Perhaps in ten years, perhaps in ten thousand. This too shall pass.

'For the nations rage, the kingdoms totter; but the Lord utters his voice, and the earth melts.'

Why do I speak of such depressing things? That you may *'not put your trust in princes.'*

'Come, behold the works of the Lord, how he has brought desolations upon the earth.'

Indeed, all earthly things our God shall bring to desolation, for they are passing things, and pass they must. For if they did not pass, we would trust in them, even worship them as gods. The Lord *brings desolations* that we might not become idolaters, entrusting our lives to created things, but know God alone as *our refuge and strength*.

It is the Feast of the Reformation. On this day, we usually listen to some of our favorite hymns, hear a nice sermon about a monk who nailed a few pieces of paper to a door, then go home, have a few beers, and think about how great it is to be Lutheran.

But if we think that the Feast of the Reformation is about a monk with a hammer, then we do not understand the Reformation at all.

It is true that the Reformation was about the rediscovery of the Gospel during a time of spiritual darkness, where foolish priests taught that salvation could be bought. It is true that the Reformation was about the recovery of the Scriptures, and the rebirth of God's word among His people.

But the Reformation attests to a greater truth, and the eternal truth, that no matters what befalls both church and state in this fallen world; whether plague and persecution; whether heresy or downfall; Christ, who alone is *from everlasting to everlasting*, shall preserve His body, His people, His baptized, as He has in the beginning, and now, and forevermore.

For He has loved us, and not with a mortal love, but the love of the *only begotten of the Father*. A love undying; a love which *God has put together, that no man may tear asunder*.

All nations and empires; all ambitions and dreams of man; all these are fleeting, for they are but the vanities of sinful beings. *All I s vanity*. But the Church shall never pass away, the kingdom of God, which is *not of this world*, shall never pass away.

Simple history attests to this; that every great empire has risen and fallen; every philosophy has been praised then gone extinct; every ideology has found its end in the graves of murdered men; but past all these things, though sometimes only in the darkness of the catacombs, the Church has lived on, outlasting all works of man, all the thoughts of the proud which have been *made lowly*.

The Church has outlasted them all, and ever shall, for it is sustained by the Word of Christ, and the Lord Himself declares '*heaven and earth shall pass away, but my word shall never pass away.*'

This is the truth hammered upon the door of that church in Wittenberg; the truth that God shall ever and always sustain His Church by His Holy Word unto the end of the world, and into the glory of heaven. That no heresy shall ever conquer her. That no kingdom shall ever slay her. For the Church is the lampstand which bears the light of the Wisdom of God, *and the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness shall not overcome it.*

Last week, we were told to *render unto Caesar what is Caesar's*. And in short time, we shall all go do our civic duty, consider the present evils, the *wars and rumors of war*, and in our best wisdom, go to the ballot box, and render to our earthly authorities what is their own.

But our kingdom is not of this world, nor is our King. And though, as you go in to vote, you may hear the voice of this or that talking head, of this or that partisan news anchor or political hack, as you leave, let only the voice of your true King fill your mind, for though we worry about the problems of our country, from without of the true *kingdom without end*, the Lord our King's voice declares:

'I will be exalted among the nations; I will be exalted in all the earth.'

Therefore, 'Be still, and know that I am God.'

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Preached by Pastor Fields

Sermon Texts: Psalm 46; Revelation 14:6-7; Romans 3:19-28; Matthew 11:12-19.