

Sermon Notes for 10/2/16 (Pentecost 20)
Preached at Jehovah Lutheran – St. Paul, MN
Text: Habakkuk 2:4, 2 Timothy 1:12, Luke 17:10
Theme: GOD READIES US FOR WORSHIP

The Point: Our real preparation for worship comes as the Holy Spirit implants faith in our hearts and teaches us day by day to live in repentance and trust in God’s promises.

Introduction: So how do we get ready for worship? Well, perhaps you think about getting out your dress clothes (though that seems a little outdated for a lot of people these days). Or maybe you focus on making sure you have your check made out for the church offering. (I am glad that Connie prepares our offering, or I would probably forget it most of the time.) You might need to think ahead about how you are getting to church, especially if you are not able to drive (like I experienced for most of the summer). But these are all external exercises, not likely to prepare us adequately for true worship.

Since we suggested last week that worship is primarily the faith interactions between us and God, we need to think about what that means for our worship preparation. Repentance and faith are the essence of worship. They are also the proper preparation for worship. Sometimes people get a little disappointed or disheartened about the path of Lutheran worship because of the starting point of repentance, confession and absolution. Earlier liturgies included in the prayer the phrase “a poor, miserable sinner,” and that sometimes triggered some negative responses. Even with the explanation that “miserable” meant “in need of mercy”, some people see the expression as depressing. I get that. But I also fear that our common “folk religion” has assaulted our hearts and minds with the idea that we are all “okay” and not in need of any correction or repentance.

If we have gotten to that point, it is altogether fitting that we should hear the word from Scripture, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.” And that truth remains accurate, no matter how old we get or how mature in the faith we are or how often we have strayed from our Father’s will and our Father’s home.

Simply being on a church roster is hardly an adequate preparation for worship. The pollster George Gallup writes, “There’s little difference in ethical behavior between the churched and the unchurched. There’s as much pilferage and dishonesty among the churched as the unchurched. And I’m afraid that applies pretty much across the board: religion, per se, is not really life changing. People cite it as important, for instance, in overcoming depression – but it doesn’t have primacy in determining behavior.” (George H. Gallup, “Vital Signs,” *Leadership*, Fall 1987, p. 17)

In today’s Gospel, Jesus tells the story about the master and the slave. The slave’s constant drive and purpose is obedience to the master, taking care of the master’s needs and wishes. He concludes the teaching this way: “So you also, when you have done all that you were ordered to do, say, ‘We are worthless slaves; we have done only what we ought to have done!’” Even if we were able to keep the law of God perfectly, we could make no claim on God, for we would only be doing what was demanded of us.

But, of course, we know that we have not fulfilled God’s will perfectly – not even close! So the designation of “worthless slaves” certainly applies more surely to me in my current situation than it would if I had perfectly fulfilled the law, if I had done all that I was ordered to do. Someone has rightly said, “If we postpone repentance for one more day, we have a day more to repent of, and a day less to repent in.”

This is not the last word, however. There is a word of life, a word that we heard in today’s Old Testament reading: “The righteous **live** by their faith.” We are invited to put our faith in the Lord who says that we

are no longer servants, but friends. And by that faith we can really and truly LIVE. Jesus has taken upon Himself the burden of obedience that we could not shoulder. He accepted the Father's will that He should come and walk in our shoes for thirty-some years. He walked the perfectly obedient life that we had failed to walk. And in doing so, He also credited that obedience to you and me. As we trust in Him, His perfection is placed into our account. And finally He also poured out His lifeblood on the cross.

By Christ's actions we have been set free from sin and death. We have been made His own family. Now our calling is to live up to the status which He has granted to us. He calls us saints and invites us to walk with Him down the road of obedience. He makes us children of God and invites us to walk in that confidence through every trouble. He positions us as sheep of His flock and invites us to follow His voice and know His deliverance.

Paul knew the need for repentance. But he also knew the true repentance, the repentance that not only turns from sin, but also turns to God in Jesus Christ. He says in today's Epistle, "I am not ashamed, for I know the one in whom I have put my trust, and I am sure that he is able to guard until that day what I have entrusted to him." We can trust God to be faithful all the way to the end of the age and beyond.

One more critical point needs to be stressed. Oswald Chambers puts it like this: "It is not repentance that saves me; repentance is the sign that I realize what God has done in Christ Jesus. The danger is to put the emphasis on the effect instead of on the cause. Is it my obedience that puts me right with God? Never! I am put right with God because prior to all else, Christ died. When I turn to God and by belief accept what God reveals, instantly the stupendous atonement of Jesus Christ rushes me into a right relationship with God. By the miracle of God's grace I stand justified, not because of anything I have done, but because of what Jesus has done. The salvation of God does not stand on human logic; it stands on the sacrificial death of Jesus. Sinful men and women can be changed into new creatures by the marvelous work of God in Christ Jesus, which is prior to all experience." (Oswald Chambers quoted in *So Great Salvation*, Charles Ryrie, Victor Books, 1989, p. 91ff.)

Conclusion: Our real preparation for worship comes as the Holy Spirit implants faith in our hearts and teaches us day by day to live in repentance and trust in God's promises. We have been changed into new creatures and have new desires, new thoughts, new purpose, new direction in life. Because Christ has died, I am brought into oneness with the Father. Because His Spirit creates faith in my heart, I can rejoice with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, I can pray with joy and confidence, and I can forgive others as I have been forgiven. In other words, my life can be a worship setting from start to end. In Jesus' name, AMEN!