**Matt 11:12-19 (ESV)**

From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force. **13**  For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John, **14** and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come. **15**  He who has ears to hear, let him hear. **16** “But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their playmates, **17** “ ‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.’ **18** For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon.’ **19** The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds.”

**“Best of Times, Worst of Times, Time for Jesus”**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen. Celebrating the Reformation is all about God’s Word. This was not a word giving the order for revolution. This was not a word about worship of a man named Martin Luther. Instead, it was God’s Word breaking forth to save sinners by faith in Jesus. The changes made by Luther were in a time of deep despair. He translated the Bible and church service into German because only the elite could understand Latin. He reintroduced giving wine along with the bread to laity at communion because only the priest could receive both. He preached salvation as a gift from God because the only preaching heard put salvation upon saving self. In such times of despair, God was giving a reason for people to rejoice in the Gospel.

Jumping ahead to modern times, C.F.W. Walther recognized a different spirit. He said,

*“*…it is precisely the Lutheran Church which is accused of retaining many papal abuses and of having been the least successful in cleansing itself. It is pointed out, for example, that in our church priestly clothing, church ornamentation, pictures, altar, crucifixes, candles, confession, the sign of the cross, and the like are still apparent. But, my friends, whoever regards these innocent things as vestiges of the papacy knows neither what the papacy is, nor what the Bible teaches” (cyberbrethen 10/28/11).

In other words, seeking change as the source of success or dispose of the past is not the same as God’s love in Jesus Christ. Much is different today from that of the Reformation, but despair remains under the surface of it all. Some things never change in a sinful world. Only God by the Gospel an endless reason to rejoice. Whether the best of times or the worst of times, it is time for Jesus to be our Savior.

Refusing to mourn means to miss what God’s says to sinners. God makes salvation known through the preaching of His Word. It is why John the Baptizer came before Jesus. “For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John, and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come.” The song John sang was sadness over sin. It was repentance in the face of self-righteousness as promoted by the Pharisees and Sadducees. They tried to label John as a demon because he dared to speak the truth. Martin Luther saw the same righteousness by works as well in the Medieval Church. They tried to erase away sin with a self-service of buying indulgences. Yet, the 95-thesis challenged such silliness made up by sinful men. The first thesis declared, “When our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, said "Repent", He called for the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.” For such words, Luther too received the label “demon” from those in authority as they excommunicated him.

We too can refuse to mourn the call to repentance. Children who do not hear the song of sadness are just plain spoiled and stuck up. As St. Paul said, “Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.” Repentance is the only way we get to Jesus. It is to believe in His righteousness as the sinless Son of God. Our moralistic tendency is to search for some other way to cover up the mess. It is to label sin as “not so bad” as others. It is to change the Law from what is “good to be bad” and what is “bad to be good.” I could put the weight on my love to make it all better, but God out of love calls all to repent and believe in Him. If there is no room made to mourn. We miss the fact that God knows no matter how glorious, how noble, and how right we want to be. He sees through it all to the despairing sinner trapped before the Law who needs another way. It is to repent and believe in the Gospel.

Refusing to dance means to miss how God saves sinners. God makes salvation known through the preaching of Christ. He is the Word become flesh. It is why Jesus came after John the baptizer. While exposing their sin only frustrated the Pharisees and Sadducees. They hated Jesus because He came only for sinners. As was said, “The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!” Did Christ contradict the Law? Did the Savior encourage sin? No, His song called every despairing soul to dance with Him. It was to go to the cross as He suffered and died for a sinful world. This good news of faith in the Savior is what Luther recovered. All salvation, righteousness, and peace came from the death and resurrection of God’s Son. By His Word and Sacrament Jesus shows Himself dwelling with sinners. He comes to forgive, restore, and save by faith in Him. This conflicted with the Roman Church at every level from praying to saints, position of Mary, place of relics, purpose of the pope, and why works even mattered at all.

We too can refuse to dance over what the Father gives by the sacrifice of His Son. Children who do not hear the song of celebration in Jesus are distrustful. They forget His forgiving Word comes to save sinners. As St. Paul said we, “are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.” Who is the worst sinner throughout time? Jesus judged on the cross. Who is the greatest for all eternity? Jesus justified by the cross. Too simple a gift to receive in a modern society that worships works in terms of production. No amount of abundance in life compares to what abounds in Christ for sinners. His promise, “Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sin” extends salvation of His cross into our life. Rather than a therapeutic god designed to make me feel better about myself, the true God saves me from myself by His sacrifice. No need to bear my guilt alone, Jesus gives the guilty an absolution, “Go in peace!” Despair is the devil’s torment over our works. Jesus undoes this torment by His Word. He gives a gift of righteousness from God outside of self. A promise to believe God puts to shame sin, death, and the Devil by the Gospel.

Whether the best of times or the worst of times, it is time for Jesus to be our Savior. If we neither mourn nor dance by what God proclaims from His Word, then nothing has changed no matter what may change. Jesus said, “Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds.” The wisdom of John the baptizer dared to preach repentance to turn hearts to the Gospel. The wisdom of Jesus dared to die for the salvation of every person to give the Gospel. There is far more knowledge today than at the time of the Reformation. Do we still have wisdom to recognize how God works by His Word? Luther had a conscience captive to the Word of God. Nothing else mattered and this is what made the difference. It brought light to a dark world where salvation was a free gift for sinners. God grant us such wisdom in our time. God justifies by faith in Jesus as we work in an ever-changing world that knows not the way of the cross. Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.