



The Federated Church of Hyannis

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Weekly Message From the Pastor and Sermon Notes for October 31, 2021

This Sunday is Reformation Sunday. And so the message will cover both the message of the Reformation and Stewardship. November 14th will be Stewardship Sunday.

If you would like me to visit you at your home, please call the church office. At the beginning of the pandemic, I did not get the chance to do many house visits. However, after being vaccinated and the decrease in cases of COVID, I feel safe and comfortable making house calls if you would like me to come to your home. I am happy to bring communion with me if you would like to have communion at home.

Sermon: “Make Me A Steward of Your Treasure, Part 3”

Scripture: Romans 3:27-28: “Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith. Therefore, we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.” **Ephesians 2:8-9:** “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.”

INTRODUCTION:

October 31st is Reformation Sunday. Martin Luther is known for his strong argument against the practice of selling indulgences. He sparked a reformation that we are justified by faith alone, and not by works. On October 31, 1517 he nailed the 95 theses to the door of the Church in Wittenberg. It was on hallow (holy) eve, which we call Halloween today. This is because November 1st is all saint’s day. But there is a history behind why the Church began selling indulgences in the first place, and it has to do with the message of Stewardship.

PART 1: “The Basilica in Rome”

Pope Leo the 10th (Leo X) was challenged with the crumbling infrastructure of the Basilica in Rome which was the symbol of the Roman Catholic Church. It was built in 800’s AD. By the 1500’s the building was crumbling and in

disrepair. A sense of urgency was felt by the Church leaders to raise funds and renovate the building. It had structural failure, and the feeling was if the church collapsed it would shake the faith of millions of Christians who looked to Rome as the center of the Christian faith.

The Catholic Church had for years tried to raise funds to maintain thousands of churches that people looked to for spiritual and social support. The Catholic Church had begun selling positions of Cardinals and Bishops to wealthy families in Europe to support some parish communities. The thought was these wealthy families could fund the needs of the community through the parishes. Cardinals were as young as age 11 as families attempted to buy positions of status for children who would not inherit family land. The Catholic Church was financially bankrupt, and the majority of the wealthy bankers in Europe were in Germany or the Netherlands. So the Catholic Church began selling indulgences. The concept was if a person financially supported the rebuilding of the Basilica in Rome, God would grant favor to that person and reduce the time they or a loved one might spend in purgatory waiting to enter heaven. Most priests believed it to not be true, because one cannot buy God's forgiveness. But the Catholic Church had to resort to drastic measures to avoid bankruptcy and to rebuild the symbol of the Catholic Church, the Basilica in Rome. And so the Catholic Church began selling indulgences, and Luther protested against it.

PART 2: We Cannot Buy Grace Because it is Free

Last week I shared how a tithe is a way of ensuring everyone shares equally in the ministry of the Church. It is not a fee. It is not charity. It is not a God tax. It is equal responsibility in a community that promotes equality.

Luther, looking at Romans 3:28 came to the conclusion we are justified by faith alone, and not by our deeds. In essence we cannot buy our way into heaven. It is only by believing through faith that we can be forgiven of our debts to God, and therefore enter heaven. Which leads to the teaching that stewardship is an act of faith, and not an act of works. God has given us resources to be Stewards of to challenge us to be faithful in managing. No matter how hard we work, we cannot buy grace. It is only by acting in faith that we can have the outward expression of the invisible grace within.

CONCLUSION:

Stewardship is an act of faith. No matter how hard we work, or how much we give, we cannot purchase grace. Therefore, Stewardship is not about how much we give to God, it is how faithful we are using what God gives us to be Stewards of. And to practice equality, requires faith that others will respond faithfully as well.