



FIRST PRESS

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FRIDAY, OCT. 31, 2014

UPCOMING EVENTS:

Nov. 2, 9 a.m.

Sunday School in the Pastor's Study: Exodus 32, "Behold, out came this calf"

Nov. 2, 10 a.m.

Morning Worship: Psalm 87, "The City of God"

Nov. 2, 11 a.m.

Centennial Thanksgiving Lunch

Nov. 4, 9 a.m.

Mississippi Valley Presbytery

Nov. 5, 5:15 p.m.

Midweek Bible Study, *What do Presbyterians Believe: "Adoption"*



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From the Pastor's Pen . . .

This Lord's Day we will give thanks as a congregation for the 100th Anniversary of the sanctuary. In 1914, First Presbyterian Church took up residency in this beautiful house of worship built in the American Neo-Classical Style.

As we come to worship and reflect on a century in this building, it provides us with ample reason to give thanks to God for His faithful and abundant care for this congregation particularly over the last 100 years in this building (and since its founding in 1838).

Some time ago, I was part of another church as she celebrated her own 175th Anniversary. Over the course of several weeks they had a number of different guest ministers come and preach or speak to us in light of that milestone. One oration in particular stood out to me because he focused on how great the congregation was, how rich in

property and influence the church had become, and its many programs. He went on (and on) late in the evening with all the things that the congregation had done and accomplished.

But what we will do in our worship and commemoration of this milestone for our congregation is reflect on the God who has preserved us in this building for a century. We'll look together at Psalm 87 in which the prophet considers (using the language of the Old Testament, under the Old Covenant) the enormous privilege that God has given to the church, to Zion.

I hope that you will come and join us at 9:00 a.m. for Sunday school and then our special service of worship and thanksgiving at 10:00 a.m. followed by a fellowship meal lovingly prepared by our faithful WIC. Oh, and it's the end of Daylight Savings, so you can get an extra hour of sleep this week!



Westminster Shorter Catechism Meditation

We come now to the Second Commandment. The First Commandment, you remember, teaches us that we must worship the True and Living God and that we must worship Him exclusively. The Second Commandment concerns how we worship Him.

Q49. Which is the second commandment?

A49. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.

So, the First Command concerns worshipping the right God and the Second Command concerns the worshipping the right way. This com-

mand has always been a great stumbling block for the people of God. People have always wanted to improve and adjust the way God commands us to worship Him.

In Sunday School, we are at the base of Mount Sinai when Israel built a Golden Calf to represent their redeemer who led them out of Egypt. Over the next 3000 years of church history, the church was continually tempted (and often gave in) to utilize images in worship and devotion. But this is greatly displeasing to God.

The problem with using images in worship is that no image can accurately or adequately convey who God is and what He is like: "God is a Spirit and does not have a body," says our *Children's Catechism*. Instead of by using images, God reveals Himself to us by His Word and Spirit.

Whenever we make an image to represent God, we are forsaking not only the word of this command, but neglecting all the other words that He has told us about Himself.

Happy Reformation Day!

Today, October 31st, marks the 497th Anniversary of what historians widely regard as the beginning of the Reformation. While some of us may be aware of the Reformation, fewer of us begin to comprehend its importance or significance in terms of religion and piety as well as sociologically. We'll look briefly at the impact and concern of Luther's 95 Theses and save the last item for a PBS documentary.

Martin Luther, whose 95 Theses famously "began" the Reformation, did not intend to start anything of the kind. **Luther merely posed the question of whether it was right for the church to be selling "indulgences" to those who could afford them.** In Rome, an "indulgence" is a removal of the penalty for sin. Luther posted his theses, on what we would call the "academic bulletin board" hoping for a scholastic debate on the legitimacy of this practice.

In his day, the Pope at Rome wanted money to build a new basilica and to finance it, he authorized the sale of indulgences. These indulgences promised remission of the penalties of sins in exchange for money. While Luther's own prince banned the sale of these indulgences within his territory, Luther was outraged at the idea that his parishioners might be traveling to a neighboring town to go and buy them. Luther's 95 Theses decry the sale of indulgences by developing a number of themes:



Reformation Day

First, the Christian life is to be one of repentance and daily turning from sin rather than doing things (penance) to obtain pardon and removal of penalty. Here he was critiquing the Roman Catholic sacrament of penance.

Second, the church, and particularly the pope, lacks the authority to forgive sins, only God can do this.

Third, he criticized the Roman officials for their accumulation of massive wealth and palaces rather than caring for the poor and indigent. Luther even went so far as to suggest the Pope build the basilica out of his own money rather than by inducing poor people to buy indulgences!

As you might imagine, the uppity-ups in Roman church hierarchy did not take kindly to this assault on their fortunes and they went to great lengths to silence Luther. In spite of their attempts, by God's grace a great revival broke out in Northern Europe as people heard the gospel words of Christ and of salvation by grace alone in the Scripture.

Even Roman Catholic practices were forced to be changed as a result of Luther's teachings and actions. For example the outright sale of Indulgences was banned by Roman in 1567, although **to this day** charitable contributions can still help you *earn* an indulgence.

For us, we must not simply celebrate the events of the Reformation, we must embrace the salvation proclaimed by the Reformers drawn from the pages of the Holy Scripture.

Sermon Snapshot

Over the past five weeks or so we've been considering on Sunday "**the Nature and of the Church and the Christian Life.**" We've looked at three texts so far that give us particular insight into what it means to be a Christian and a member of the church.

In **James 2:14-26**, we read the words of Jesus' own brother. James is dealing with folks who have orthodox theology about God, they have the right knowledge about Him, but many of his audience are not living lives that reflect that knowledge. James is dealing with a common heresy in our own day, the idea we are saved simply because we "believe" something. James argues that if you truly know God, if you have true saving faith, Christian faith, that faith will transform the way you live your life.

We then looked at **II Timothy 4:1-5** over the course of two different weeks. Here Paul is giving his last words, his final advice and charge to his young associate Timothy who is going to be an elder in a very difficult church where there are unqualified elders and deacons, heresies enticing people away from the truth, and people exercising authority who shouldn't. In short, Timothy was joining a group of elders who were a complete mess! But Paul's charge to Timothy is simple: **be faithful to the Word**; shepherd the church with the Word, be committed to it, apply the Word of God to

every situation in the lives of the congregation members. Even though Timothy was going into a trouble spot, he was to remain steadfastly committed to the word of God.

The third text we looked at together was **Mark 10:13-16**, which gave us profound insights into the nature of the church and of our salvation. Jesus shows us the importance of a Christian home and a Christian family in the discipleship of children. God loves the children of believers and welcomes them as His subjects and reminds us of the special care that the church is to show to the children of believers. Of course, Jesus also teaches us something fundamental to gaining eternal life: **it is not based on your qualifications but only upon God's mercy to sinners.**

This Lord's Day we'll be looking at **Psalms 87**, which will teach us more about the glories of the Church and how God sees her. Then, for the rest of the year, we'll be looking at several of the Old Testament prophecies of the Lord Jesus Christ. You may not know that the Hebrew people were waiting for Jesus to come for centuries (the way they greeted Him certainly doesn't give that away, does it?!). When we look at these prophecies, we can better understand what Jesus came to do. Then, starting in January, we will begin a new series in the **Gospel of Mark, Introducing Jesus.** Pray that God will bless our study of His Son.