

Sermon October 30, 2011

Reformation Day

Sermon Text – Matthew 11:12-19, Revelation 14:6-7

Title: *Moving from Dirge to Dance*

Theme: The music of the eternal Gospel plays on, bringing us from dirge to dance.

## INTRODUCTION

The architecture of the building first strikes you with sweeping arcs of gleaming glass windows. As you pull up to the main entrance there's valet parking with vested attendants waiting outside an impressive entryway. Inside, the paneled walls stretch up high, and you are greeted with friendly people behind a polished wooden desk. There's a bamboo-lined glass walkway that looks out onto an atrium with sculptures and walking paths. The brand new, smooth-running elevators are silent and fast and they open onto a spacious waiting area with comfortable chairs, artwork and a view over looking the river from which you can see the heliport. There's even a Walgreen's on the ground floor.

Then there's the room, which is spacious and bright, with windows overlooking the atrium. Even though the room is a single, it has two LCD flat-screen televisions, either one of which would put mine to shame. With the push of a button, you can adjust the lighting, adjust the bed and lower the shades. There's wireless internet and room service is fast and efficient. You have a full menu to choose from and the staff is available 24/7. The nice thing is that all of this is only a few minutes from here. It is really quite the place and it would seem to be a wonderful place to spend a long weekend, except for one thing...

This place is a Central DuPage Hospital.

I got to spend a few days in the new wing last weekend while my father had his knee replacement surgery. My niece, who is a practicing nurse, was in town from South Carolina to check things out and make sure that her Grandpa was in good hands. After spending two nights in the room, Katie was able to give CDH her professional review.

From the quality of care by the surgeons, nursing staff, aides and attendants, to the wide selection of food on the menu, she gave it a resounding “thumbs up.” And Dad agreed. Oh, it will take weeks of therapy before he’s back to normal, but overall, there were no complaints.

Yet that’s not true of everyone spending time in that new wing at CDH. In fact, when I talked with another family who was on the same floor as Dad’s, they immediately spoke of their dissatisfaction. The clock was not in a good spot, the tray tables didn’t roll easily enough, the style of beds didn’t work well with the new equipment, the second television was a waste and... well, you get the picture. No matter how opulent the room, no matter how efficient the staff, some people will just not be satisfied.

Quite honestly we’re all a bit like that. In a land where we are given so much, we love nothing more than complaining about it. We’re no different really than the generation Jesus was talking to in our Gospel reading for today. No matter what we may have, no matter what we are given, we tend to find flaws, reasons to turn our noses and not be satisfied. New or old, fast or slow, black or white, we’ll always find something to complain about.

No matter what is playing, it seems, dirge or dance, we find some way to ignore the music.

## THE LAW and GOSPEL THEN

In our reading from the Gospel of Matthew we can almost picture Jesus shaking his head as he tries to find the right words to describe those around him. *“But to what shall I compare this current generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their playmates. ‘We played the flute for you and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.’”*

Dirge or Dance, they children simply wouldn't join in.

Jesus had just heard the news that his cousin John the Baptist was in prison for preaching repentance. His message was the dirge, the mournful song of death. John came pointing out the Law, the truth that we are all miserable sinners and in need of salvation, because to remain in our sin only means death. But this generation would not listen. John was too different. He was too strict and too severe. He wasn't any fun, and they would not listen to his slow, dirge music.

But John's preaching prepared the way for Christ and His message of salvation. John exposed the need and Christ came with the fulfillment. Jesus came piping the dance music of forgiveness and salvation. In Christ, God himself became man, took on our flesh and with it, our sinful nature. Christ came to fulfill all righteousness, to take sin, the sin of the world, and nail it to the cross; freeing mankind from the eternal death it so deserves.

If John was the dirge of the Law, Christ came with the dance of the Gospel... and yet the people wouldn't listen. If John was too severe and too strict, this Jesus was too friendly and too accepting. *“For John came neither eating nor drinking and they say, ‘He has a demon!’ The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they*

*say, 'Look at him, a glutton and a drunk, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!'"*

Dirge or Dance, they children simply wouldn't play.

### **THE LAW NOW**

Are we any different today, in this generation? We still bristle when we hear the law. We prefer to think of it as a message for others, not us. When the hard Law of God speaks the severe truth of sin, death and damnation, we prefer not to listen. We much prefer the Good News of the Gospel.

And yet, we struggle with that message too. "Can it really be true?" we ask, "Can the death of one man, even the very Son of God, really take away my sin? And not only mine, but even the sins of people who I can't stand, murderers, drug abusers and criminals? It's too hard to accept. God just wouldn't work that way. There has to be something more to it and it certainly can't be free. People have to do something more, act a certain way, talk a certain talk, don't they, to earn that kind of forgiveness?"

Law or Gospel, dirge or dance, our sinful nature tries to find fault and tune out the music of God's Word. Yes, Satan works hard to muffle the piping of the Gospel, the message of Christ and Him crucified.

### **THE GOSPEL NOW**

And yet, the piper plays on. Sinful though we are, sometimes with our fingers in our ears, the piper plays on; because He loves us that much. The beautiful, eternal music of God's Word continues to sound out. It continues to do its work of calling sinners to repentance and delivering the life-saving message of Christ. Though we may grumble, fidget and complain, God's Word continues to go out and do its

work.

Today we celebrate Reformation Day, commemorating Martin Luther's nailing of the 95 Thesis to the church door in Wittenberg. It is important to remember exactly what Luther's intention was in doing this. It was not to destroy the church of the time and create division. It was never an attempt to tear down. No, he loved his church, but he loved the Gospel more. Luther began the reformation in an effort to amplify the music of the Gospel. Years of misuse and politics had added layers of unnecessary trappings around the preaching of the Word of God and the time had come pull them off and to let it sound out in all its glory. Because the louder and clearer the music sounds, the harder it is to ignore.

This music, the Holy Word of God, preached and proclaimed in its purity, is a mighty and eternal force. It is not merely history or poetry. It is not simply a collection of dusty morality tales. No, it is an active, vibrant and living Word. The Word of God makes things happen. It brings us out of darkness and into the eternal light of Christ. It reveals to us the dirge of the law, and then brings us into the dance of the Gospel. 1 Thessalonians, chapter 2:13, "*And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it, not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.*"

Through the power of the Holy Spirit the music of the Word goes to work and makes things happen. It makes things happen just as it did at creation, when the Creator spoke and our world was formed. It goes to work today just as it did when it became flesh and dwelt among us in the form of Jesus Christ. It goes to work exposing our sin with the dirge of law, and then draws us into the dance of salvation. It goes to work attaching itself to our hearts and to our souls, giving us

knowledge, faith and a peace that passes all human understanding.

The music of the Word, through the power of the Holy Spirit, goes to work and makes things happen when it attaches itself to simple water, as we (will see/saw) today in the Holy Baptism of little Quinn Elise. Baptism is the piping dance music of the Gospel at work before our very eyes, because in baptism, simple water and Gods Word come together and freely bestow life and salvation into a sinful heart. Drawing her from the dark dirge of sin into the brilliant dance of the Gospel. That's Romans 6, "all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death... For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his." (So go ahead Mom, today at the luncheon, take Quinn and do a little dance. Join in the music of the Gospel and celebrate the gift of eternal life both you and your child have by being united into Christ Jesus.)

The dance music of the eternal Gospel goes to work and makes things happen when it attaches itself to bread and wine in the Holy Supper, delivering to us the very body and blood of our Savior Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of sins. Uniting us with Him and all the company of heaven.

And this music gets played to the entire world. Our first reading from Revelations 14 states that in clear and dramatic terms. *"Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people."* Young, old, rich, poor, foreign or citizen. No matter the country, no matter the language. English, Spanish, German, Chinese, Arabic or African, the music of the Gospel plays on. It plays on wherever it is preached, prayed, read, sung and taught, here at Trinity and across the world.

We may choose to put our fingers in our ears, like those children in the marketplace, refusing to join in, but that will not stop the music. We may choose to pick it apart and try to find something to complain about. We sinful humans are good at that. But that won't stop the music either. No, the music of the Word cannot be stopped. It plays on. Slow or fast, Law or Gospel, the word goes out around the world, making things happen. Bringing our souls out of the darkness of sin and into the light. Taking us from the dirge of our sin and into the eternal dance of salvation in Christ Jesus.

Now may the peace of God, which passes all human understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.