

Celebrating Reformation
October 28, 2018

Text: Revelation 14:6-7

Theme: "High Noon"

"High Noon," that's a 1952 western starring Gary Cooper, but it's more. It's the time when the sun is at the apex of the sky. Today in Jonesboro high noon will be at 12:46 pm with the sun rising at 7:21 am and setting at 6:11 pm. On December 21 high noon will be at noon. If someone is experiencing a high noon that could refer to this person being at the apex, at the height of ability and power. High noon can also refer to confrontation, judgment time, time to face the music. Such it was for Gary Cooper in "High Noon." At this high noon the heat is on, no place to hide, a great intensity. Does such a thought bring fear?

Today we celebrate Reformation. This Wednesday, October 31, will the 501st anniversary of the event. One Dominican monk in Wittenberg had been feeling the heat most of his life. He had been living in fear, no freedom from it, often even a great dread. But then freeing news for him, the Gospel of freedom in Christ. He wanted more to hear. He wanted people to look to Jesus, to Jesus alone for forgiveness. In such a concern he nailed those 95 Theses to the door of the Castle Church questioning the practice of indulgences. Events would move rather quickly. Heat would be on Luther to back off, to recant from his teaching. But he would weather the storm as he looked to the One who had faced the heat for him, a heat much more intense than anyone in this world could place on him.

High noon, protection is needed. If you want to look up at the sun at high noon you could sport these (solar eclipse visor). But before the holiness of the righteous God, not a chance. We look to the One who is our shield.

Our text is from Revelation. In our reading for today from the book we see that God is about to bring the heat. This letter was first sent to people feeling the heat in the seven churches in Asia. It has spoken and encouraged those feeling the heat in churches of all times and all places ever since. Revelation shows us things are really going to get bad, beastly bad. Chapter 13 puts before two bad beasts. The one is out of the sea. He makes war on the saints and is allowed to conquer them (v 7). The other one is out of the earth. He is more deceptive, horns like a lamb, but speaks like a dragon (v 11). This second one is the one often designated (from other Scripture references) as the Antichrist, the one with the number. Both are agents of the dragon, the devil. He is the one who makes war on, brings the heat on the offspring of the woman (the church), those keeping the commandments of God and holding to the testimony of Jesus (12:17). The battle between the dragon and the followers of the Lamb is pictured throughout much of the book.

But there's good news, lots of it. Part of it is there is a limit, a time when the battle will be over. "Then I saw another angel flying **directly overhead** (high noon), with the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people." (v 6) The command is to fear God and give Him glory because the hour of His judgment has come, and to worship Him (v 7). Judgment—how is that good news? Who can take the heat on that day? Back in chapter 6 we read (from the mouths of those not longing for His coming), "Fall on us and hide us from the face of the Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?" (vs 16, 17)

This will be high noon when Jesus returns. But the cry from many is, “what heat?” ‘Where is this day of His coming; things just go on the way they have since creation.’ (2 Peter 3:4) ‘Any talk of a return of Jesus, God coming to set things right—who can ever know such a thing?’ ‘I’ll just accept my lot in this tumbling and churning of molecules and make the best of it as I can.’ Others may reason, ‘yeah, it just may happen, but why worry about that day, still morning, not close to high noon.’

Martin Luther was feeling it and fearing it. From the prevailing teaching of his day he saw redemption in Christ, but it was limited. There were eternal penalties to sin, which Christ took care of, but also time limited penalties for the sinner to deal with. Who even knew if his faith was sincere enough to receive the benefits of Christ’s work? The best most folks could hope for was to end up in purgatory. There they would pay off the balance of penalties for their sins that they had completed while living. The purging heat would burn off that balance year after year after year. Who could know the end of the numbers of those years? But finally, one day, paid in full and entrance to the presence of God.

God was easy to fear. He was fearful and always demanding more. There was no shading or shielding from His holiness and wrath. You tried to appease Him the best you could. Those in the sacred orders had a better shot of being more holy.

It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. No human shades will block out the consuming brightness. Many don’t fear, but that will not keep the heat from coming. One day every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of the Father, but for some it will not be a confession of faith, but a submission to fact at that high noon. The law puts before us our just desserts, no excuses will work. As we read in Romans 3, “so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world held

accountable to God.” (v 19) For those outside of Christ on that day, “Depart from me, you who are cursed into the fire prepared for the devils and his angels.” (Matthew 25:41) “And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest day or night,” (Revelation 14:11) high noon giving way to an eternal night of torment.

The heat of the law leads us to seek out the shade. Human shades don't cut it. Martin Luther worked very hard at that in praying, fasting, masses, self-flagellation, pilgrimages (to Rome), but peace never came. You could seek some shade by appealing to those who had gone before you, the exceptional ones, no more so than Mary, but also those declared to be saints. They could be more sympathetic to your predicament, put in a good word for you before the throne. Or if you put down some cash and bought an indulgence the Pope could dip into the account of those who died in the black and credit it to you.

Human shade won't do no matter how well thought out or intricate. The teachers of the law in Jesus' day, who took offense at Jesus' words about freedom supposing they were free as Abraham's children sought some shade in their traditions. Jesus tells them that their behavior would indicate the devil was their father. They really had no shade. We have no shades to offer, none that can stand. This includes the shade of reshaping god to fit one's concept of what god ought to be. “My god would never judge anyone.” But no shade will be found and high noon draws closer.

But there is shade, complete and full. It's found in the Light. In this one there is no darkness at all. The light of His truth leaves nothing in the dark. He lights up the darkness of our sin, sin for which we have earned the high noon of God's righteous judgment. No, no human shade will save, but Jesus does, has! He took our place to face the that high noon. It happened there on that cross, from the third hour until the ninth hour, from 9

am through 3 pm, right through high noon. The Father turned His face away from the Son, forsakes Him as He accounts Him as all our darkness, all our sin. And darkness comes over the land from high noon through the middle of the afternoon. And it is for us. We are justified freely by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus whom God put forth as a propitiation by His blood, to be received by faith.” (Romans 3:25)

In the shade of His redemption we are set free. Luther learned that it was for him. He was accounted righteous. He was okay, even perfect before God because of the cleansing and covering of Jesus, the Jesus who was put to death for his transgressions and raised for his justification. He was set free indeed by the truth of the Word, the Word now made flesh. He was saddened even angered that people were still being encumbered in lies. The hammering home of his points is still heard 501 years later. It is for us. Jesus has gone through the high noon of God’s justice for us.

In Him we find solace and strength and direction. In Him we have rest, peace that surpasses all understanding. In Him we will have rest eternal. “And I heard a voice from heaven saying, “Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.” “Blessed indeed,” says the Spirit, “that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!” (Revelation 14:13) Believers who die are separated from their sins as they have all been taken by Jesus, but not separated from their works done in faith. Now their works have passed through the fire, and unlike our works now, always tainted by sin, these are perfect. These works never save us, but are the fruit of faith that serve those around us and bring honor to God.

Blessed are those who die in the Lord. They are there before God joining their voices of those from all tribes and languages and nations, there with the Lamb. They are

clothed in robes made white in His blood and are crying out, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.” (Revelation 7:9-10) For them there is no hunger, no thirst, no scorching heat, no more high noon (7:16) The Lamb leads them to springs of living water and every tear is wiped away. (7:17) They await that return of the Lord from above, that time when they will come with Him on the clouds, even as we wait from here below.

We wait freed, freed from the condemnation of our sin as Jesus has endured the high noon of judgment for us. We live as those freed from the domination of sin to serve as our Lord’s royal priests. We remember and give thanks for the work of Martin Luther today. The battle is still joined, the dragon is busy knowing his time is short, but the victory has already been won. For Jesus’ sake. Amen