

Celebrating Reformation
October 30, 2016

Text: 2 Thessalonians 1:1-12
Theme: “Worthy of Your Call?”

Worthy, worth. Worth is value, “what’s it worth to you,” we may ask? Are you willing to exchange something of value to make it yours or to bring it about? Worthy—demonstrated value. “The World Series is worthy of your attention.” Now whether the tickets are worth the prices that are being asked is another matter. It is quite the human interest story this year—intriguing, two teams that haven’t won the world series for quite some time. Maybe it is worth the price of admission. For Cubs fans it’s a once in every other lifetime experience.

Worthy appears three times in our text, though if you counted you would only come up with two. There are three different Greek words, all with the same worthy root ($\alpha\chi\iota\omicron\upsilon\sigma$, axios). We see it in verse 5, “that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering.” It’s in verse 11, “that our God may make you worthy of His calling.” And verse 3, “We ought to give thanks to God, for you, brothers, as is right (right—worthy of our taking the time to give thanks).” Are worth and worthy worthy of such attention?

Tomorrow, All Hallows Eve, is the Day that Martin Luther nailed those 95 Thesis on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg. It will be 499 years ago tomorrow. Next year we will get to party like it’s 1517. Dr. Luther’s work is worthy of our consideration. He had more than a few

questions about worth and worthiness that plagued him, even tormented him. God had the answers, even was the answer. When Luther knew that answer he couldn't keep it to himself, just had to get it out.

How can one be worthy before God? Could one every achieve worthiness acceptable to God? Such questions troubled Luther as he had no good answer to them, no answers that brought comfort. In our lesson from Isaiah 1 we read, "though your sins are like scarlet...through red like crimson." (vs 18) Luther was more than a little aware of the bright blood color of his sins. It was not something he took lightly. He took seriously the warnings of Scripture that it was a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Hebrews 10:31), and the words about tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil." (Romans 2:9)

Now in our age and culture the scarlet and crimson have a faded a bit, lost their attention getting pop. Actually, it seems the concept of being lost is, well, being lost. Such is the often prevailing attitudes, but God's Word has not changed. In the end it is still a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God no matter if one fears it or not.

God is holy and calls to be holy, but by nature we are holey in another way, full of holes. We are not stable trying to stay afloat on the sea of God's law. We read in Ezekiel 18:20, "the soul that sins shall die," and we have more than a few sins. One can't escape. If left to ourselves we would be pulled down.

What to do? Again, for some, it's not even on the radar screen. All dogs go to heaven so surely people do too, if there is such a place, just

automatic—up there looking over us and out for us. Now, this is not biblical teaching, just wish-it-so thinking. Holes, what holes? What sin? No, just a different way of experiencing life all around you. We could even be guilty of promoting it inadvertently. We may say automatically to the friends or relatives of one who has died, “he’s in a better place now,” or “her suffering is over,” not knowing anything about the faith life of the deceased.” Or worse we may say that when it appears the person had no faith. Lest you think I’m unfeeling, a good response when you don’t know the situation can be, “I’m so sorry. You have my sympathy. Our prayers are with you.”

But back to the this holey problem, that is, a righteousness of our own that is full of holes. What do we do about that? I could reason that my need for concern is lessened by your greater need for concern. Yes, there are some holes, but not so many as you. We could try to find comfort in our efforts to try to do good, to seek justice and correct oppression (Isaiah 1:17), but have I done enough. Well God be pleased, or if not pleased, just a ticked off on a bearable level. How can I plug the holes?

As Luther thought about dealing with the justice of God, or at least trying to deal with it, he was moved to become a monk. Actually he became a very, very good monk. Maybe he could plug the holes by spending hours confessing his sins. Perhaps denying himself of adequate clothing and cover to keep out the cold in the winter could be such a plug. He even became a priest and eventually a doctor of theology. Could he

learn how to plug the holes, keep out the waters of God's judgment by studying the philosophers and the theologians? How much Aristotle and Aquinas would it take? Could his fears be assuaged by availing himself to the indulgence system of the church? On a trip to Rome on church business he would crawl up those steps on which Jesus stood on trial before Pilate (so it was claimed for those steps) stopping on each step to kiss it and to say an Our Father (*Here I Stand*, Roland Bainton, Kindle ed., location 634). Would any of this bring relief, plug up those holes?

There was some short term relief, but no lasting success. When it came to righteousness before God, Luther knew that he was more Zacchaeus than Zacchaeus, that is short, way short. It was not a matter of holes, simple not sea worthy at all. How could a human hope to stand before God at all? Roland Bainton, in his work, *Here I Stand*, would describe Luther's thoughts as follows: "Who can love a Christ sitting on a rainbow, consigning the damned souls to the flames of hell? The mere sight of a crucifix was to Luther like a stroke of lightning. He would flee, then, from the angry Son to the merciful Mother. He would appeal to the saints--twenty-one of them he had selected as his especial patrons, three for each day of the week. All to no avail, for of what use is any intercession if God remains angry?"

But relief would come, come in the Gospel. Luther heard it's call. We would later say, "Night and day I pondered until I saw the connection between the justice of God and the statement that "the just shall live by faith." Then I grasped that the justice of God is that righteousness by

which through grace and sheer mercy God justifies us through faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and have gone through the doors to paradise...before the “justice of God” had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressible sweet in greater love. This passage of Paul became to me a gate to heaven.” (Bainton, Kindle, location 837). Yes, more than a few holes, not able to even begin to stay afloat. But there was one who was worthy. God became a man and navigated the sea of God’s justice perfectly. In Jesus there were no flaws, no defects, no holes. He was perfectly afloat. And yet He took on our sin. The Holy One becomes our sin and experiences the depths of God’s justice in our place.

Luther found the Gospel. He was what Luther believed and proclaimed. Luther had, we have, new life in Christ-the crucified, risen, and ascended Jesus. We were buried into His death, and raised with Him in the waters of baptism. His righteousness is ours. Our sins were all taken by Him, atoned for, taken from us and drowned in the depths of the sea. It is His call that brings us to faith. It is by His righteousness that we are worthy before God.

Paul writes to the believers in Thessalonica in our text, “This is evidence (persecutions they are suffering) of the righteous judgement of God that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering...They [those inflicted you with persecution] will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction...when He comes on that day to be glorified in the saints, and to be marveled at among all who believe.’ (2 Thessalonians 1:5, 9, 10)

Is this worthy life we have in Christ worth it, that is, with the trials that come along? The answer was certainly “yes” as demonstrated by those Thessalonian Christians. Pressure was coming upon them, trouble, from Jews were not convinced that Jesus was the Christ. Paul preached in Thessalonica for three Sabbath days and at the end those three Sabbaths some of the Jews could stand it no longer. They formed a mob, dragged some of the new believers before the city authorities shouting, “These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also...they are acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king, Jesus.” (Acts 17:5, 6) Such was the world the Thessalonian Christians were living in. Paul prays they may continue in the faith faithfully.

It was worth it for Luther. He heard the Gospel, believed it, proclaimed it, persevered. So he would post those 95 Theses in hopes of having a discussion with church teachers on the door of the Castle Church on October 31, 1517. In those he would assert, among other things, “The true treasure of the church is the most holy gospel of glory and grace of God.” (Thesis 62) It was not the “treasury of merits” from which the Pope could dole out indulgences for reduction of time in purgatory.

You and I have that Gospel. This means we have something to say. We have the message from God’s Word that sets us free. We have the Law which shows us we are sunk, never able to save ourselves. But praise be we have the Gospel, the news of Christ crucified and raised for us, the Christ who returns in glory to be glorified in His saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed.” There with Him will be the best place

ever, forever. We have been made new to serve Him now as we move closer to that forever.

We read in our text, “To this end we pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of His calling and may fulfill every resolve for every good work of faith by His power.” We are worthy of his calling by doing those works for which He has made us and given us to do. Paul’s prayer is answered by the Spirit working in God’s Word, the Lord’s Supper, and baptism.

Being worthy before the righteous God is a given, only a given, never earned, given in Christ who has no holes to be plugged. Worthy of our calling is also a given. God gives us the strength to do it. He does His work on us here, so we may go out to do it on all our paths. For Jesus’ sake. Amen