

**Festival of the Reformation / Consecration Sunday  
Sunday, October 27 & 28, 2018**

**“Consecrated: Free for What?”**

**Rev. Ralph Wiechmann, guest preacher**

I can almost feel like it happened last night, but it was a few years ago. I woke up to the ringing of my cell phone. As I groped in the dark to turn on the light, I saw it was 2 a.m. I wondered who was calling at that time, and what was the issue. It was a man's voice who said, MY WIFE WENT INTO EARLY LABOR THIS AFTERNOON AND OUR BABY HAS BEEN BORN BUT HE IS NOT DOING VERY WELL. WE ARE NOT SURE HE IS GOING TO LIVE. COULD YOU COME OVER TO THE HOSPITAL AND BAPTIZE HIM? We have named him Matthew.

That's a hard question to ask as we want to say, Pastor, I know I woke you up, but we are so happy with the birth of our son we had to share it with you. But it wasn't good news, it was an acknowledgement that all things, including life itself comes from God and all we can do is commend our life, our children, and all we have to Him. And today as we talk about stewardship as managing all of life for God's purposes, Matthew's parents understood stewardship in a very personal way. God gave us this child; we have to put him in God's hands.

I went to the hospital and found the family in NICU the neonatal Intensive Care Unit. I asked the nurse for some water and she brought me a syringe of sterile water. Putting my hand through the opening to the incubator, I pressed the syringe to push out 3 drops of water on Matthew's forehead. His head was so dry in that incubator that each drop made a little circle on his forehead, like water hitting a blotter. I read some Scripture and prayed; we all recited the Lord's prayer, had a benediction and noticed the 3 water marks were still on his forehead.

Matthew lived and when he was well enough, his parents brought him to church, not to rebaptize him but to celebrate his entrance into God's family by the grace of Baptism. Maybe today when you get home and look at your forehead, recall your baptism when God called you into His kingdom, and know that's where you were saved by grace, freed to serve, and called to commitment.

Today we also celebrate another birth and baptism, that of Martin Luther, who was born on Nov. 10, 1483 the firstborn of Hans and Margaret Luther and baptized the next day, which was St. Martin of Tours Day and that's why he was named Martin. His parents wanted him to be a lawyer because he was so smart, but he became a monk instead. He fought with the thought of being with God alone as a sinner. A lot of masks will be worn this week but before God all masks come off and we stand all alone before Him. Paul said it this way, THERE IS NO DIFFERENCE, FOR ALL HAVE SINNED AND FALL SHORT OF THE GLORY OF GOD.

This struggle by Luther brought us the 3 alones or solas from that Reformation, grace alone Scripture alone, faith alone, which you have on your which you have on your walls here. If there is any joy in recounting the Reformation. It is the joy of knowing that we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, and everything we need to believe in or live by is in Scripture alone. Luther wanted to be free, free from sin and Satan, free to serve. At the Diet of Worms, he stated

that he was captive to the word of God. HERE I MUST STAND; I CANNOT DO OTHERWISE; GOD HELP ME

Are we captive to the word of God? Do we let the grace of God in Jesus Christ govern our lives? Are we willing to take a stand on the doctrines of Scripture? Are we willing to ask God for guidance on how St John's can live out the Great Commission? How can I be accountable to God this day and every day? Are we willing to take Stewardship seriously? Stewardship is often thought of as being just about money, but it is more than that. Yes, we will be asking you to fill out a pledge card later which deals with money. But here is our church's definition of stewardship. CHRISTIAN STEWARDSHIP IS THE FREE AND JOYOUS ACTIVITY OF THE CHILD OF GOD AND GOD'S FAMILY, THE CHURCH, IN MANAGING ALL OF LIFE AND LIFE'S RESOURCES, FOR GOD'S PUPOSES. It's free and joyous, whatever you do. It's managing ALL of life and its resources for God's purposes. Luther needed his own Independence Day. He was captive, a prisoner to personal prison. This monk felt obligated to spend entire weeks without food, without speaking until he became free, free to serve and give his life to God's purposes.

Time is a gift from God, as part of life and all of life's this gift of time and use it for God's purposes. That doesn't mean you spend all day at church but is God even in our thoughts as we plan our day resources. Do we spend it in a fruitful way or a wasteful way? Once time goes by, we never get it back. It's part of our stewardship life. When you get up in the morning, ask yourself, how do I take this gift of time and use it for God's purposes. Maybe He has special projects He needs you to do. Would you make time for God's special project or would you do yours and leave His out? Of course, that means you and God keep communicating and are on the same wave length.

There was a college professor who kept trying to debunk the existence of God. One day he walked into his class room and declared, I am going to prove to you all that there is no god. So, God, if you exist, knock me off this platform I am standing on in the next 15 minutes. Students watched their watches as it got to 13 minutes, then 14 minutes and then at 14 minutes 30 seconds, the professor said, ok God, only 30 seconds left. Then the side door of the classroom opened and in came running a 6ft.3,300-pound lineman from the football team and knocked the professor off the platform. "what are you doing?" the professor asked. The football player said, "I was in the hallway and heard you taunting God. God told me, I am really busy. Would you please take care of this for me? I said I would." The right time and the right place to do God's purpose.

Talents, and their usage is stewardship also. You will learn more about how you CAN USE the gifts God gave you here at St. John's and you will be asked to respond to them with another pledge. Jesus said, "The harvest is ready but there aren't enough workers." If God asked you for an hour of your time for a special project He has for St. John's to do to bring your neighbors to Christ, would you be free and joyous to do it? Do you have a passion for the lost who don't know Christ and would be willing to learn more about sharing your faith?

Money – what do we do with it? First, we must recognize that it and all we have and are belong to God. What is the amount we give back to God, the owner of all? It came out recently that the average American gives less than 2 per cent away. It is much higher here at St. John's among the leadership, close to 9.75 That's great. What if all of us would tithe, give 10% to the

Lord or take a step up to tithing? What would be the motive? It starts and ends with the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul said to the church at Corinth, YOU KNOW THE GRACE OF OUR Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich YET FOR YOUR SAKES HE BECAME POOR SO THAT YOU THROUGH HIS POVERTY MIGHT BECOME RICH. WoW – He rich and me poor. But now in Christ's grace, He poor and me rich. I got a check for \$15,000 yesterday from a first cousin who died recently. My first thought is to whom will I give the first \$1500 because I tithe and even more of my entire income. My first thought is the Lutheran Hour. But I do that because, not to please God so He will love me, because He loves me with all my faults and sins and weaknesses. It's in the nail-ridden hands and feet of Jesus that I find His love for me and I need to give back and manage life, and all of life's resources for God's purposes. I ask that you prayerfully consider taking one step up from your giving pattern.

There is a funny story about two men who were shipwrecked on a desert island. One man paced back and forth, worried and scared - the other man sat sunning himself without a care in the world. The first man said to the second man, "We're on a desert island. Aren't you afraid we are going to die here?" "No" said the second man, my wife and I make almost \$200,000 a year and tithe faithfully to my church every week. My pastor will find me."

Luther once said, IF ONE CAN EARN THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS AND EVERLASTING LIFE THROUGH ONE'S OWN EFFORTS, TO WHAT PURPOSE WAS CHRIST BORN? WHAT WAS THE PURPOSE OF HIS SUFFERING AND DEATH, HIS RESURRECTION, HIS VICTORY OVER SIN, DEATH, AND THE DEVIL, IF MEN MAY OVERCOME THESE EVILS BY THEIR OWN ENDEAVOR? TONGUE CANNOT EXPRESS, NOR HEART CONCEIVE WHAT A TERRIBLE THING IT IS TO MAKE CHRIST WORTHLESS.

Christ worthless = a horrible thought. IF THE SON MAKES YOU FREE, YOU ARE FREE INDEED.

We are free to serve because of Jesus Christ. I know some congregations who give to each newborn a small stole. This stole and those of your pastors symbolize that they are servants of our King and your servants. Maybe everyone should make a stole and wear it to church to say to one another, my managing of life and its resources make me God's servant and your servant. How can we serve together for God's purposes?

Here is the text that should be required for all to memorize, because it sums up Consecration Sunday and Reformation Day. Let's read it together, Ephesians 2:8-10 - FOR IT IS BY GRACE YOU HAVE BEEN SAVED THROUGH FAITH -AND THIS NOT FROM YOURSELVES. IT IS A GIFT OF GOD NOT BY WORKS SO THAT NO ONE CAN BOAST. FOR WE ARE GOD'S WORKMANSHIP, CREATED IN CHRIST JESUS TO DO GOOD WORKS WHICH GOD PREPARED IN ADVANCE FOR US TO DO.

Grace Alone. Faith alone. All to free us to serve. It really is all about Jesus and His love for you and me.

There is a primitive tribe in South America where anthropologists have learned that the most important role is the "keeper of the flame". Fire is precious in the rain forest. And the person who feeds the flame and keeps the fire alive – his role is vital. As we look at God's grace in Jesus Christ and give financially to God's work, we become keepers of the flame. You support all sorts

of ways to spread the Gospel message. You are free to love, to pray, to feed to share to serve, to forgive and be forgiven, to know how much Jesus loves you, so you are consecrated, separated from sin in order to serve, which leads to being all in, totally committed to a God who is totally committed to you. You enable St. John's to be not just a keeper of the light, but to shine as God's light to the world. Amen.