

A Sermon for Immanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church—Westfield, Wisconsin 53964  
 A Sermon for St. Paul, St. John, and Trinity Lutheran Churches—Newton, Budsins, and Mecan, WI

**Sermon Goal:** That the hearer know that outside influences must have no bearing on the Church.

**Sermon Theme:** Rebuilding the Church God's Way.

**Sermon Title:** "The Church Needs Rebuilding"

**Sermon Text:** 2 Kings 23:1-7, 15-18, 21-25

**Liturgical Date:** N/A

**Calendar Date:** N/A

**Other Readings:** N/A

**Series:** Special

**Visuals:** None

**Sermon Structure:** Narrative

**Greeting:** Grace to you and peace from God our Father, the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!

**Text:** Our text for this day, is from the Old Testament book of 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings and is read as follows:

*"Then the king called together all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. He went up to the temple of the LORD... (and) He read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant, which had been found in the temple of the LORD. The king stood by the pillar and renewed the covenant in the presence of the LORD-- to follow the LORD and keep his commands, regulations and decrees with all his heart and all his soul, thus confirming the words of the covenant written in this book. Then all the people pledged themselves to the covenant..."*

This serves as the basis for this day's meditation, in Jesus' Name. Amen!

**Salutation:** Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ.

**Introduction:** When people hear talk of "Building the Church", they tend to think brick and mortar. However, constructing church buildings, especially in that manner, is the least thing we can mean when we talk about "building" the Church. It is far more important to build the real Church, that is, God's people gathered around His Word and Sacraments, than to build new buildings. In this sense, only the Lord can build the Church. Furthermore, only the Lord Himself can rebuild it. In this world, the Church always needs rebuilding. It's needs rebuilding because we have more sin within it than we realize. The church needs rebuilding because we have better guidance than what we remember, and because God has more grace than we can ever imagine.

**Transition:** Looking at the text for today, we see that a major remodel is in progress.

**Sermon:** Nonetheless, the story is told of a man who was on his way to a costume party dressed as the devil. The night was dark and stormy, and his car went off the road into the ditch. After slogging across a field in his red devil suit, he went to seek help at a nearby church where the lights were on and a service was underway. Just as he opened the church door, there was a crash of lightning and a loud clap of thunder. People looked back and saw this devilish-looking figure standing in the doorway. They made for the exits in droves, all except this one little old lady. Standing with her cane, and shaking a bit as she spoke, she said: "Mr. Devil, I don't know what you want here, but I've got only one thing to say. I've been a member of this church for eighty years, but I want you to know I've really been on your side all along."<sup>1</sup>

**Transition:** Now there's no denying it, each of us has an old Adam like that, we enjoy being on the side of the devil when it fits us.

Nevertheless, we have more sin within than we realize. Years ago, people used to talk about "the seven deadly sins." In fact, these are not the only sins that prove deadly. All sin kills. But these seven give us an insight into the sin that fills all human lives, Christians too. They are pride, greed, envy, lust, anger, gluttony (or over-indulgence), and laziness. Can we honestly say our lives are free from every trace of these? Can we even begin to claim that we have none of these because we are so filled with God? Certainly not. When

<sup>1</sup> See *The Concordia Pulpit for 1978* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1977), 11, quoting D. L. Deffner, *The Possible Years: Thoughts after Thirty on Christian Adulthood* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1973), 83.

we think about it, we also have a lot of remodeling to do, a lot to get rid of. How unwilling we can be to put ourselves out, even for spiritual things! We have delicately bought into the idea that there is a Christianity without a cross, without self-discipline and crucifying the flesh. Olympic athletes put themselves through rigorous training, giving up all sorts of side pleasures for the sake of their sport, but we Christians seem quite capable of thinking we can accumulate all sorts of bad habits and sins and never be called upon to give any of them up! Yet all sin kills, and we have more sin within than we realize.

That is one of the reasons why the Church always needs rebuilding. But it also needs rebuilding because we have better guidance than we remember. In the text, King Josiah's study of God's Word showed him his sin and that of the nation as nothing else could. What he had remembered of God's Word was sketchy, vague, and incomplete.

For us, too, there is no substitute for God's Word, certainly not the occult influences that Josiah wisely rooted out. These attempts to get guidance from the spirit world are still around in the form of séances, Ouija boards, even the innocent-looking horoscope column in the newspaper. If you are a Christian, Jesus is your Lord, and you have no business messing with any of that stuff. The Lord gives us far better guidance than any of that earthly stuff.

In his Word, the Lord shows us our sin, and that is always uncomfortable. Three hundred years before this text, as Jeroboam, the first king of the Northern Kingdom, was starting idolatrous worship in Bethel, the Lord had sent a man from Judah who predicted that Josiah would put an end to all sacrifice on the illicit altar there. Prophetically, this man even gave Josiah's name! When Josiah actually did what was predicted, he did not even know he was fulfilling a prophecy. The local people told him about it. How absolutely accurate the Lord's Word had been, even though it was forgotten by so many!

God's Word remained every bit as accurate when a prophet like Isaiah foretold that a virgin would conceive and bear a Son, and call him "Immanuel," God with us. This accuracy held when Isaiah gave graphic details of Christ's substitutionary suffering as the Servant upon whom the Lord laid the iniquity of us all, and it continued when Isaiah by inspiration predicted this Servant's restoration to life and victory. God's Word was accurate, too, when Isaiah brought the message of people streaming to God's Church for peace and blessing in the future. All of this is better guidance than we often remember.

**Transition:** So, we need to remember it, and we need devote ourselves to learning it. We Christians ought to know God's Word at least as well as we know about our favorite hobbies or sports teams. But beyond mere mental exercise is deeply drinking God's Word in and depending on it.

Years ago, there was a devastating earthquake in Central America. Six thousand people died, largely because their homes had been poorly constructed, and built right atop on fault lines. People knew the construction was flimsy and the locations iffy. They knew these things, but that was all.<sup>2</sup> We have great guidance from God in his Word, and much more than simple guidance. In it, we have the Christ upon whom we depend. The Church always needs rebuilding, and we have the best foundation on which to build: the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ himself as the cornerstone. In God's Word, we have better guidance than we remember.

And in Christ, the Lord has more grace than we imagine. This stands out as the last and best reason for the Church's constant rebuilding. God's Word always points us to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, God made Man, who lived for us, suffered and died for us, and rose again. Yes, we have sin, more than we realize. Yet he always has more blessing than we can even imagine. Where sin abounded, the Bible says, grace abounded still more.

As much sin as we have, Christ has more forgiveness. As much as we are beset by the devil, Jesus has completely overcome the world. As much as we are hounded by death, our Lord gives us life. He always has plenty more where that came from, mercies new every morning, and grace upon grace.

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<sup>2</sup> See *The Concordia Pulpit for 1977* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1976), 268.

He has more than one way of bringing this grace to us. That is why at the time of the exodus the Lord had instituted the Passover, which had been in disuse for centuries and centuries before Josiah revived it. No wonder the people had strayed religiously! They had taken their attention off the Lord, off of his forgiveness, off of the coming Christ. For the Passover was all about Christ. A Passover lamb was to be perfect, with no broken bones, yet deliberately killed and its blood applied in order to save people from death.

The Passover was all about Christ, the sinless Man who is also God. He was deliberately killed, yet no bone of his was broken, not even on the cross. No less than the blood of this risen Christ is applied to us all these years later in the Lord's Supper. We drink the cup which is the new testament in his blood, poured out for us for the forgiveness of sins. We eat his body given for us, and so we have life from him.

The Lord knows that we have much sin. But he remains so abundantly rich in his grace that he provides us counsel and help against sin in a number of ways. He does this through the spoken Word, through Baptism, through the Lord's Supper, through the power of the keys, and through what has been called "the mutual conversation and consolation of brethren."<sup>3</sup> Christ himself gives us the privilege of being involved in rebuilding his Church as we speak his Word to one another. For really, it is God's Word—not various forms of entertainment or social gatherings—that builds God's church.

**Conclusion:** My dear friends in Christ: In this sinful world, the Church always needs rebuilding. The rebuilding is necessary because we have more sin than we realize. This rebuilding is always possible because we have better guidance than we remember in God's Word of Law and Gospel. Especially can the Church constantly undergo rebuilding because in our Lord Jesus Christ God has more grace than we can imagine. So, let the building continue! Volunteer, you time and your talent. Come to worship and bring you families and friends. Make time for Bible class and fellowship activities. Help rebuild the church, according to the Lord's Will, by doing your part. In His Name. Amen!

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<sup>3</sup> Smalcald Articles III iv (*Concordia*, 278).