

## Prep for our Day in Wittenberg

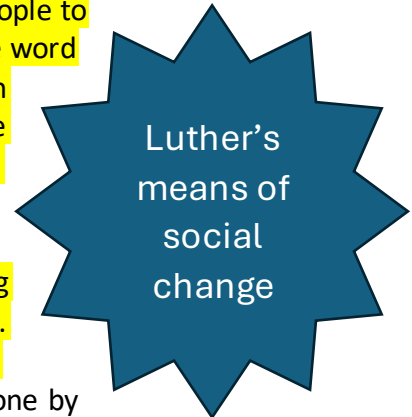
*From the beginning of Luther's second of "Eight Sermons" delivered upon his return to Wittenberg after his exile in the Warburg Castle.*

Dear friends, you heard yesterday the chief characteristics of Christians, that their whole lives and beings are grounded in faith and love. Faith is directed toward God, while love is directed toward people and consists in sharing with neighbors the love and service that we have received from God without our having worked for it or deserved it. Thus, there are two things: the one, which is the most needful and must happen before all else; the other, which is free and not of necessity, which may be kept or not without endangering faith or incurring hell. In both, love must deal with our neighbor in the same manner as God has dealt with us; it must walk the straight road, straying neither to the left nor to the right [cf. Matt. 7:13–14]. In the things that are "musts" and are matters of necessity, such as believing in Christ, love still never uses force or undue pressure. Thus the Mass is an evil thing, and God is displeased with it, because it is performed as if it were a sacrifice and work of merit. Therefore it must be abolished. Here, there can be no question or doubt, any more than you should ask whether you should worship God. Here we are entirely agreed: the private Masses must be abolished. As I have said in my writings,<sup>29</sup> I wish they would be abolished everywhere and only the common evangelical Mass be retained. Nevertheless, Christian love should not employ harshness here nor force the matter. However, it should be preached and taught with tongue and pen that to hold Mass in such a manner is sinful, even though no one should be dragged away from it by the hair; for it should be left to God, whose word should be allowed to work alone, without our work or interference. Why? Because it is not in my power or hand to mold human hearts as the potter molds the clay and fashion them at my pleasure [Ecclus. 33:13]. I can get no further than their ears; their hearts I cannot reach. And since I cannot pour faith into their hearts, I cannot, nor should I, force anyone to have faith. That is God's work alone, who causes faith to live in the heart. Therefore we should give free course to the word and not add our works to it. We have the *jus verbi* [right to speak] but not the *executio* [power to accomplish]. We should preach the word but the results must be left solely to God's good pleasure.

Now if I should rush in and abolish it by force, there are many who would be compelled to consent to it without knowing where they stand, whether it is right or wrong, saying, "I do not know if it is right or wrong, I do not know where I stand, I was compelled by force to submit to the majority." And this forcing and commanding results in a mere mockery, an external show, a fool's play, human ordinances, sham-saints, and hypocrites. For where the heart is not good, I care nothing at all for the work. We must first win the hearts of the people. But that is done when I teach only the word of God, preach the gospel, and say: "Dear lords or pastors, abandon the Mass. It is not right and you are sinning when you do it; I cannot refrain from telling you this." But I would not make it an ordinance for them, nor urge a general law.<sup>31</sup> Whoever would want to follow me could do so and whoever did not want to would remain outside. In the latter case the word would sink into the heart and do its work, so that such people would become convinced, acknowledge the error, and fall away from the Mass; tomorrow another would do the same. Thus

God would accomplish more with the word than if you and I were to pile all our power into one heap. So when you have won the heart, you have won the person such that the thing itself must finally fall of its own weight and come to an end. And if the hearts and minds of all are agreed and united, abolish it. But if all are not heart and soul for its abolition, then leave it in God's hands, I beseech you, or else the result will not be good. Not that I would again set up the Mass; I let it lie in God's name. Faith must not be chained and imprisoned, nor bound by an ordinance to any work. This is the principle by which you must be governed. For I am sure you will not be able to carry out your plans. And if you should carry them out with such general laws, then I will recant everything that I have written and preached and I will not support you. This I am telling you now. What harm can it do you? You still have your faith in God, pure and strong so that this thing cannot hurt you.

Love, therefore, demands that you have compassion on the weak, as all the apostles had. Once, when Paul came to the mighty city of Athens (Acts 17[:16–32]) he found in the temple many ancient altars, and he went from one to the other and looked at them all, but he did not kick down a single one of them with his foot. Rather he stood up in the middle of the marketplace and said they were nothing but idolatrous things and begged the people to forsake them; yet he did not destroy one of them by force. When the word took hold of their hearts, the people forsook them of their own accord and thus the thing fell of itself. Likewise, if I had seen people holding Mass, I would have preached to them and admonished them. Had they heeded my admonition, I would have won them; if not, I would nevertheless not have torn them from it by the hair or by using any force but would have let the word act and kept praying for them. For the Word created heaven and earth and all things [Ps. 33:6], so that the Word must do this thing and not we poor sinners.



In short, I will preach it, tell it, write it, but I will constrain no one by force, for faith must come freely without compulsion. Take an example from me. I opposed indulgences and all the papists, but never with force.<sup>34</sup> I taught, preached, and wrote God's word alone; otherwise I did nothing. And while I slept [cf. Mark 4:26–29], or drank Wittenberg beer with my friends Philip and Amsdorf, the word did so much that the papacy weakened in such a way that no prince or emperor ever inflicted such damage upon it. I did nothing; the word did everything.<sup>36</sup> Had I desired to proceed with violence, I could have brought great bloodshed upon Germany; indeed, even at Worms I could have started such trouble that even the emperor would not have been safe. But what would it have been? Mere fool's play. I did nothing; I let the Word do its work. What do you suppose the devil thinks when one tries to establish something by making a big noise? He sits back in hell and thinks, "Oh, what a fine game the fools are up to now!" But it does him harm when we spread the word alone and let it alone do the work, for it is almighty and captures hearts. And when hearts are captured the work will fall of itself.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Lohrmann, M. J. (1522). [The Invocavit Sermons](#). In H. J. Hillerbrand, K. I. Stjerna, T. J. Wengert, & M. J. Haemig (Eds.), *Pastoral Writings* (Vol. 4, pp. 20–22). Fortress Press.