

Fundamental without Fundamentalism
Anno Dominum 2010

Dr. Mark A. Hoffman
St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church
Millersburg, Pa

Many years ago, I was appointed chair of
a certain synod's W,M, & the Arts Committee.

That was before I started hanging out with a certain crowd,
...people who took their ordination vows seriously,
...people who truly believed the Word of God,
the whole Word of God, and nothing but...
...certain people from the LCMS.

In the midst of those blissful years,

I was recruiting participants for a Service, when
a potential preacher inquired as to the texts.

I told her.

She asked, "Where'd you get those?!"

"From the Daily Lectionary," I replied.

"Oh no," she sneered, obviously knowing better than me,
"those texts weren't meant for preaching;
I only preach on the Sunday readings."

I felt like saying, "Well, la-ti-da!"

But the issue wasn't just her attitude, was it?!

...

Here I stand, close to twenty years later,
with texts before me straight from the Daily Lectionary.

And I understand what her problem was. I do.

I understand that the law makes people uneasy, even preachers;

... some people will contort their minds in

a myriad of ways to get out from under the law;

...certain institutions will even justify their actions by

contriving a false and untenable Gospel-based ethic,

subverting the very jots and tittles of the law;

I understand... but I'm not in agreement.

I, for one, don't have a problem preaching the whole Word of God,
...making a proper distinction between Law and Gospel.

In this morning's First Lesson,
much to do is made of the proper posture,
the proper attitude for the Day of Atonement.

We hear: *It shall be for you a time of holy convocation and
you shall afflict yourselves...*

*...for whoever is not afflicted on that very day
shall be cut off from his people...*

*It shall be to you a Sabbath of solemn rest and
you shall afflict yourselves.*

...

Now there are those who would wish to excise such texts,
at least from public reading if not even from the Bible.

First off, they would form a committee and
spend 2 years and \$40,000, only to determine that
most people aren't comfortable with being afflicted.

Then they would judge the command to afflict ourselves as
an antiquated historic custom
no longer applicable to our enlightened age.

But if the affliction of the OT is excised, ignored, or obfuscated,
then what happens to the affliction of the NT,
specifically in that beautiful passage of Romans 5:

*We rejoice in our afflictions, knowing that affliction produces endurance,
and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope
does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our
hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.*

Following St. Paul's logic, we can easily assert that
if we have no afflictions, we will have no hope.

This truth is most evident in our Lord himself.

Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows,

Yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted.

Were our Lord not afflicted on the cross,

we would still be in our sin and in eternal affliction.

And we have heard the clear warning about the one who
*hears the Word and immediately receives it with joy,
yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while,
and when affliction or persecution arises...
on account of the Word,
immediately he falls away.*

We fully understand that living life as a Christian means that
as the servant is not above his master,
so we *too* will be afflicted, persecuted, and hated.

We need not join a group of flagellants,
whipping ourselves with chains or
scourging ourselves with cat-o-nine tails.

Instead, we have a far better means of being scourged,
we have a more efficacious affliction among us:
we have invited Pr. Larry Vogel to speak to us.

And, in all seriousness, I hope and pray that he will indeed afflict us,
that he will afflict us with the pure Word of God,
that Word which brings us to our knees so that
we may stand forever,
being delivered from wicked and evil men.

Most if not all of us here today have experienced
affliction for the sake of the Gospel, especially in recent days.
Ironically, I myself currently stand accused of being a fundamentalist,
of taking the Bible literally.

The accusation itself as an affliction pales against
the smear campaign which this person brings against me.

I actually laugh at the accusation that I am a literalist.

As a pastor and teacher in the Lord's church,

I teach that Adam and Eve are not proper names but are the Hebrew words for man and woman.

I do not know nor care whether the Lord created the earth in 7 days or 70 years;

I am much more concerned about

the truth about the Creator in the creation stories.

Conversely, I am certain that, when our Lord said, not 7 times but 70 times are we to forgive...

He meant that forgiveness ought never end.

I love to teach using the age-old theological method of typology.

If we understand that what we know about God

we know through the 2nd person of the Holy Trinity, Jesus Christ,

then we understand that when the man and woman heard

the sound of the Lord walking in the Garden,

they were hearing the footsteps of

the 2nd person of the Holy Trinity who would later become

incarnated in Jesus Christ.

So also, the ram caught in the thicket, who gave his blood instead of Isaac,

the man who Jacob wrestled,

the voice from the Burning Bush,

and the finger which wrote the 10 commandments

were all of the 2nd person of the blessed and Holy Trinity.

And I'm a fundamentalist – are you too?

For your sake we are being killed all the day long;

We are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.

We are afflicted.

We are afflicted because we are confident that

the Holy Scriptures are indeed the Word of God;

...the Word of God speaks the truth about Him who is the Truth;

...there is only one who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life;

...we are on the straight and narrow path whose
destination is our eternal life!

Affliction will follow us from the day of our Baptism until

the day when we are received into the blessed rest of everlasting peace.

Even in today's Gospel we hear of our affliction

although it is not evident at first glance.

To be afflicted it to be pressed as grapes in a wine press,
pressed until ones innards spill out.

When grapes are pressed,
they are placed between ever-narrowing walls.
Humans in the same situation would consider
themselves to be in dire straits.

Thus we have the "strait" and narrow path –
one which literally means a path of affliction.

Enter by the narrow gate, the gate which presses upon you,
enter by the gate of affliction.

The other one, the gate which is wide,
the one which lets in any manner of ideas and conduct,
the one which never calls foul nor fair,
the one which leads to destruction and damnation,
that gate is wide and the way is easy,
it is full of desire and temptation and
is attractive to many, the slothful and self-indulgent.

In contrast, we are told that those who find the gate of affliction are few.

Not, I think, because it is hard to find, but

simply because it is unattractive – very unattractive.

It is a gate of humility and sacrifice;

...renunciation of worldly possessions;

it is a gate which bloodies hearts and pierces souls.

This gate is very, very hard, but

it is the *only* gate which leads to eternal life.

Jesus Christ is the gate of affliction.

Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.

He is the one who does the will of the Father who is in heaven.

He is the one who was wounded for our transgressions,

bruised for our iniquities.

Through him and through him alone we enter into eternal life.

To him be all honor and glory, now and forever. Amen

This document was created with Win2PDF available at <http://www.win2pdf.com>.
The unregistered version of Win2PDF is for evaluation or non-commercial use only.
This page will not be added after purchasing Win2PDF.