

## *Tough Enough?*

As we begin the month of October we Lutherans may feel a little surge of adrenalin coursing through our bodies as we shudder with a little excitement ... at least we should! October isn't just another month for us Lutherans, it's the month when we celebrate the Reformation! It's the month when we celebrate who we are!! We are the church body who claims the work of brother Martin Luther who attempted to bring Christ back to the center of the faith practiced by the Roman Catholic Church of his day. Instead of reforming the church, Martin's followers ended up starting a new movement popularly called The Lutherans.



This may not seem like a big deal to most of the world, but it is for us. As a matter of fact there are those who look at Christianity as a crutch for the weak. They say: *"Real men don't need the church. Christianity is just a crutch for those who are weak."* Those who think this way are certainly not alone in this opinion. There are other people in history who have felt the same way. Karl Marx, the author of the Communist Manifesto once said, *"Religion is the opiate of the masses."* Marx maintained this low regard for religion and, for Christianity in particular, but he also wrote in a letter to a friend, *"When all the political foundations of religion are wiped out, then normally religious faith, the Christian faith, would have to disappear. But it is not out of the question that the Christian faith will survive. This would mean that there is a religious reality that does not depend solely on the sociological and the institutional."*

I think that Marx was saying, if Christianity survives, even after you wipe out its organizations and institutions, then you'd better pay attention to it, because there might be some reality to it. Communism spent almost a century trying to wipe the Church out, but today communism is basically in shambles, while Christianity still flourishes.

Another fella who thought Christianity was for the weak is William Ernest Henley. He's the guy who wrote the poem Invidicus. Perhaps you remember ... the most famous line of that poem is, *"I am the master of my fate; I am the captain of my soul."* He sounds like a solid, got-it-all-together kind of guy. Wonder how life went for him? After his daughter died, he was thrown into total despair. That's not surprising. The death of a child will affect any normal human being. Sadly, the man who was the "master of his fate and the captain of his soul" ended up killing himself.

We've all known strong men, big men, tough men ... men who had been hardened in war, men who had withstood more than any man should have to withstand. But each of those men, in his honest moments, would have to admit there were things that he could not face. Such as the sickness or death of a child. Your strength doesn't make any difference at that kind of moment. There had to be times when they looked inside and saw that, although the world considered them to be tough, they weren't nearly as independent as they wanted people to believe them to be. Some were lonely. Some had been hurt. Each one had a different moment ... a time when they hit a wall, when they couldn't go it alone. Most of the ones who survive find some assistance outside of themselves through Christianity. Knowing that you have Someone Who understands, Who cares, Who loves, Who forgives you, no matter what you've done, makes a tremendous difference. They were still real men; but they didn't have to stand alone anymore.

Consider our Lord's disciples. According to tradition, Matthew was killed by a sword in Ethiopia; Mark died in Alexandria after being dragged behind a chariot through the streets. Luke was hanged on an olive tree in Greece; John, he died of old age, but only after exile and a number of narrow escapes. Peter ...he was crucified in Rome with his head downward; James the Great was beheaded in Jerusalem; James the Less was thrown off the temple, and then they beat him to death. Philip was hanged on a pillar in Phrygia; Bartholomew was skinned alive. Andrew was bound to a cross from which he kept preaching about Jesus. Thomas was stabbed with a spear; Jude was shot with arrows. Matthias was stoned and then beheaded; Paul was beheaded at Rome by Nero.

After reading all that litany of pain and suffering, do you think anybody ought to be able to say Christianity is for sissies? Think about it ... if I were to talk about the average person and ask them to describe Jesus, would they say he is gentle or tough? Was Jesus a man of action or a pacifist? Since we're talking about the perceptions of most people, they'd say a pacifist. Was Jesus strong or soft? Soft. Do you see a pattern developing here? Jesus is almost always perceived to be Someone Who is gentle, kind, loving, and turning the other cheek.

Even though that is that the way the Bible shows Jesus, there's also more. Jesus also took a whip and chased the moneychangers and merchants out of the temple. Jesus, being the Son of God, was strong enough

to fast for 40 days in the wilderness and still ward off the devil's temptations. Jesus was tough enough to walk up and down the hills and valleys of Galilee, Samaria, and Judea. Jesus was able to outthink, outtalk, and outwit every smart guy that tried to trip him up.

Therefore, this common belief shows only a partial picture of Jesus. Jesus was, along with being God's Son, a most exceptional man. He was an apprentice carpenter in the days before power tools. He is an amazing Savior, but He is also a spectacular example of a man. Strong enough to be gentle, powerful enough to be kind, confident enough to be silent in the face of criticism and accusation, committed enough to stand His ground, even though it was inconvenient for Him to do so.

What difference does this all make? If you realize that Christianity is in a life and death struggle with Satan for the souls of humanity, Christianity needs powerful, faithful, strong confident men and women to take the stands that need to be taken, to make the confessions that need to be heard, by the power of the Holy Spirit. As the world goes downhill, it's going to be harder to be a Christian. That's why we need a solid example that says the Prince of Peace is also the Prince of Power.

Blessed Reformation to all! That's the View from Here!

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