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Festival of the Reformation  
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Grace and Trinity Lutheran Churches, Wichita  
Matthew 11:12-19

*In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit*

The wisdom of our world says that if the tv doesn't work, hit it.  
Shake the gumball dispenser.  
Kick the vending machine.  
Get the job done, by any means necessary.  
Just do it.

That's how we go through life.  
Everything comes by force.

Kingdoms press on this way, too.  
Caesar crossed the Rubicon not by persuasive words, but a powerful army.  
Napoleon, Hitler, the Spanish Armada, American and RAF pilots—all came by force.  
And the victor writes the history.

That's the way and wisdom of this world.  
The kingdoms of the earth forcefully press on.  
They fight and they conquer.  
And we want to be just like them.

Luther's Reformation almost went that way, too.  
Some men like Andreas Karlstadt and Thomas Munzer couldn't wait.  
They wanted results—change—and they wanted it now.  
So, violently they took it by force.

But Luther knew that's not how it is with the kingdom of heaven.  
Our Gospel today says most clearly,  
“**The Kingdom of Heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force**” (Mt 11:12).

Now what sort of kingdom is that?  
What good's a kingdom that suffers—  
that's attacked and oppressed from every side?  
And what sort of God would have a kingdom like that?

Well, certainly not a God who wants to be known by His power and force!  
This God, who's kingdom suffers violence and the violent take it by force,  
is the God who wants to be known for His weakness, for His humility, for His suffering.

This is the God who refuses to be known by His sword and army,  
but by His cross and suffering and death.

“**The Kingdom of Heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force.**”

Jesus speaks these words first to those who know and have followed John the Baptizer.

John was in prison.  
 His preaching caused Herod to bind him in the prison cell.  
 Soon John would lose his head as a witness to Christ and His Kingdom.

And the Pharisees now had their eyes set on Christ—  
 not faithful eyes, by any means, but murderous, scheming, violent eyes.

They wanted to destroy Christ and *His* kingdom.  
 They thought He was a fraud.  
 He didn't look anything like a king, and His disciples were no great army.

They're right, you know.  
 Looking at Jesus, you'd never know you were looking at the Kingdom of Heaven.

Look at the way He hangs on that cross, *Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews*.  
 Look at his weak arms, all out of joint and frail.  
 Look at that crown that pierced his scalp, and the blood that soaked the dirt below.  
 He was despised and rejected—a worm and not a man.

He looks like no kingdom this world has ever known.  
 Where's the power?  
 Where's the glory?  
 Where's the force?

And that's Jesus' point:  
 The glory of Christ is seen on the cross—it's hidden under suffering.

**“The Kingdom of Heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force.”**

John was locked up for his preaching of Christ and the kingdom of God being near,  
 eventually getting his head lopped off.  
 Jesus, who is Himself the Kingdom, also suffered violence, being tried and mocked and crucified.  
 And then the saints that followed: Stephen, Peter, James, and Paul—all martyrs of the kingdom.  
 Luther, too, though never killed, was certainly persecuted and looked at with violent eyes.

Luther was pressed on both sides:  
 by those who violently opposed his return to the Lord's Word alone,  
 and by those who wanted the Kingdom in ways apart from the Word.

But Luther knew that any true Reformation is a reformation of the Word.  
 A trust in God's work alone.  
 That we can't take the kingdom by force.

He knew that Jesus *is* the Kingdom of Heaven.  
 He suffers violence, not only at the hands of violent men like Pilate and the Sanhedrin,  
 but also the violence due to the sins of the world—yours and mine as well.

He suffers the violent wrath of God against sin once and for all.  
 He bears the judgment of all.  
 Never has such violence ever been seen or felt.  
 Never have the violent taken a kingdom by force like this.

And that's *our* kingdom.  
 That's our glory.  
 This Jesus, the Word made flesh for us, is the Kingdom of Heaven who suffers violence for us.

However, you can be sure that if you're in Christ,  
     like John the Baptizer, Stephen, Peter, James, Paul, all the martyrs, and Luther too,  
     you'll suffer as well.

The Church suffers violence.  
 She suffers attacks from the Devil constantly.  
 He won't leave her alone.  
 He brings jealousy and discord, false doctrine, and self-trust as often and as fiercely as he can.  
 He whispers words of force and violence into our ears.

One of his favorites is to convince the Church that she should be like the kingdoms of this world.  
 She should be glorious, successful, rich, powerful, effective.  
 She should force her way, by any means necessary, advance the kingdom.

And the more Satan plants that seed in your ear—  
     that you should see clear signs of prosperity and success and advancement—  
     the more he's able to lure you away from the suffering Church and faith in Christ,  
     and point you to yourself.

To lure you away from the suffering Church is to lure you away from the suffering Christ.  
 And to be apart from Christ crucified, is to be apart from God Himself.  
 Because that's how God wants to be known.

The Church is marked by this cross.  
 She suffers the attacks of others, and from her own sin.  
 The Church suffers from her own backstabbing and anger and jealousy and pride and gossip.  
 She suffers from false teachers and from not knowing the faith well enough to defend it.  
 She suffers from disunity and a lack of love and desiring to look different than she is.

And yet she is the Church,  
     the bride of Christ,  
     His body.  
 The two have become one flesh—  
     so she is the Kingdom of Heaven,  
     and she also suffers violence.

But when the violent take her by force, she suffers with hope.

For she clings to the Word:  
the Word of Resurrection,  
the Word of sins forgiven,  
the Word that justifies us, making us right before God and one another.

For now, the Church waits.  
She suffers, hopes, and trusts in Christ alone.  
He will reform His Church.  
And He'll do it by His Word.

While Luther drank Wittenberg beer with his friends Nicholas and Amsdorf,  
the Word did the work and created faith in Christ alone.

Same goes for us—beer, or no beer—  
the Word is everything.

Lord, keep us steadfast in Your Word.

*In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit*