

SERMON FOR REFORMATION DAY 2018
TEXT: MATTHEW 11: 16-19
THEME: WHY WON'T YOU COME OUT TO PLAY?

“But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their playmates, ¹⁷ “‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.’ ¹⁸ For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon.’ ¹⁹ The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds.

In the name of Jesus:

A familiar refrain that my parents heard when I was growing up was this: “Is Jack home? Can he come out and play?” And likewise the parents in our neighborhood heard a similar inquiry when I came to the backdoor of a home of a friend in the neighborhood: “Can Alex come out and play?” And in asking the question it was done in all innocence and fun, the neighborhood kids would go to the door and ask, “can our friends come out and play?”

Today, on this day when we celebrate the Reformation, our culture is asking a similar question of those in the church, asking us: “Why won’t you come out and play with us?” Like a bunch of kids pretending when they are growing up who would play act on getting married or having kids, today the culture and the people around us ask us in the church: “Why won’t you play with us?” Jesus says in our text that this present generation is like a group of kids calling out in the marketplace to the followers of Jesus: “Why won’t you play with us, why won’t you be like us, why don’t you talk like we talk, act like we act, and live like we live?”

In the Gospels during the time of our Lord it was the religious leaders of the day who were playing the flute and calling the people to live their lives like religious people would live. “Go to the temple and offer sacrifices, dress in brightly colored

robes with long phylacteries to be noticed by others,” they would tell the people that it was okay to appear religious and play the religious kind of game. But John the Baptist saw through their hypocrisy and would have nothing of it. “But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸ Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. ⁹ And do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. ¹⁰ Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.” (Mt 3).

John wasn’t going to play their religious games. He wasn’t playing the flute with them. He wasn’t standing on the sidelines letting them get away with their hypocrisy. And Jesus didn’t either when He saw the people wringing their hands and throwing up their arms in disgust because of the godless sinners who lived as if they were better than everyone else.

Martin Luther, some fifteen centuries later, refused to play the religious games of the Roman Catholic Church at that time, refusing to believe in the notion that sinners could buy their way out of purgatory and into heaven by paying money to the Church in the way of indulgences. The Roman Catholic Church during the time of Luther would play on the emotions of family members, telling them that if they didn’t pay for an indulgence to get their families out of purgatory they would then be guilty of letting their families suffer. “Pay money and release their souls to heaven” the Church would cry. And the people, not knowing any better because

they didn't have a Bible to read would do so, until Luther came on the scene, who said that "my conscience is captive to the Word of God."

Now today we hear the same music coming from the society and culture we live in. Just like Elsa in the movie Frozen, our society sings: "No right, no wrong, no rules for me, I am free!" Such is the spirit and song of our day and age. People live as if there is no right or wrong, no rules, so we are free to do what we want, we don't have to answer to anyone or anything. And here we are on the side, singing a different tune, confessing our sins, lamenting our sinfulness, seeking God's forgiveness in Jesus, and then in thanks to God we seek to live our lives to His glory. Two entirely different songs are being sung today, one by society, and one by the Church.

Why won't you play with us, they say? And then they cry out about all of the trial and troubles of life. And there are many, inequality, prejudice, injustice, you name it. And they cry out a dirge, singing sad songs, for they have no answer to what ails us. The only song they can sing is one of sadness.

But we sing a different tune. Because we have One who conducts a different musical score. It is a song of joy and it is the song of the followers of Jesus. Yes, like the world, we lament over the sins of our society. We see the inequality, the prejudice, the injustices of our time. But we know the One who has come to take on not only all of our sins, but the sins of the society and the entire world, His name is Jesus, who came down from heaven to live the life that no one could ever live, and then offer up Himself as the perfect sin payment for the entire world.

This same Jesus comes to you today and offers to you that which the world can not offer, namely forgiveness of your sins, eternal life, and salvation. He reminds you that you don't belong to yourself or the world and culture that you live in. You belong to Him. For Jesus has purchased and won you from all sins, from the power of death and the devil, with His innocent life, suffering and death, with His blood shed on Calvary's cross. Now, in Holy Baptism, you belong to Him. And He is your Lord and Savior. He is the Master Musician who conducts your life as King of Kings and Lord of Lord. He comes to you today humbly, in a meal we call the Supper, offering to you Himself, the very body broken on the cross, the very blood shed from the cross, to refresh and strengthen you in the life God has given to you to live.

Jesus puts a new song in your heart and a new dance in your step. It is the same song that the Church has sung and the same dance that Christians have danced throughout the centuries. The song that the Lord Jesus puts in our hearts is as easy as the ABC song when we learned the alphabet. You remember that little ditty: ABCDEFG,

A: Is for Attitude: Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Philippians 2: 5-8.). Jesus calls us to have the same attitude that He has, but sadly, we don't. For a long time the society was singing our song, dancing to our tune, we lived in a Judeo Christian culture and for the most part the society was marching in lock step with

the values of the Church. Christian values were the culture's values. It got to the point that we thought that we could impose our values on others. But we can never force anyone to believe in Jesus. . Jesus shows us a better way, the way of Christ., the way of service. That is how it was in the Book of Acts. They cared for the sick, the homeless, and the hurting. They lived their faith and lived a faith of human compassion. The result was that they turned the world upside down. And we are called to do the same today in our present times. To be the compassionate and merciful face, voice, hands, and presence of Jesus to those in need.

B is for belief, the beliefs that we hold that are based on the Bible. For the Bible says: Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. Practice these things, immerse yourself in them,^[c] so that all may see your progress. ¹⁶ Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.” The teachings of the Bible are a great treasure, and we need to hold on to the truth of God's Word and share it. Remember what Jesus said to the church at Sardis in the Book of Revelation: ‘I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead.² Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God. ³ Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you. ⁵ The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of

life. I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels. ⁶He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

And finally C is for Christ, who is the same yesterday, today and forever. In Him we live, move and have our being. In Him we have forgiveness and eternal life. Jesus alone is the Way, the Truth and life. No one can come to the Father except by Jesus. And Jesus stands at the door of our world and knocks gently, asking for an opportunity to share His message of love. And He uses us to sing His song and dance to his tune. To offer to the world the hope of a new creation. The Lord redeems the life of His servants. Christ is Rock, our Fortress, our ever present help, Christ our eternal treasure.

So how will we respond when those around us invite us to sing their song, to play their games? We will refuse to play their games and sing their songs. Instead, we have a new song to sing, the song of Jesus. We will be people of the Word of God, and as such, we will let the Spirit work through the Word. This is what Luther did. When he was asked about his role in reforming the church, Luther replied that he did nothing, that the Word did everything. This is what he said:

“I will preach, teach and write the word by I will constrain no by force, for faith must come freely without compulsion. I simply taught, preached and wrote God’s Word, otherwise I did nothing. And while I slept or drank Wittenberg beer with my friends Phillip and Amsdorf, the Word so greatly weakened the papacy that no prince or emperor ever inflicted such losses upon it. I did nothing, the Word did everything.”

So cling to the Word of God and to Christ! Sing the song of love in Jesus with others. For we live and dance to the tune of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, Jesus Christ the Savior. Amen

Thanks to Pastor Steve Niermann for the idea for this message. He preached a similar message to the Ohio District Pastor's Conference in October 2015.