



# MARTIN LUTHER LUTHERAN CHURCH

Sermon by Pastor Jeremy Walloch: Drought (August 21, 2011 + Matthew 16:13-20)

If it weren't for today's gospel reading, we probably wouldn't be here, but would be standing about one mile away from here. Why?

Peter is the first to confess the Christian faith when he says to Jesus, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." To which Jesus replies, "You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church...and I will give you the keys of heaven." Much later Peter dies and is buried in Rome. In the 4<sup>th</sup> century, they decide to build a church over his gravesite.

Eventually, the church building ages and is neglected, so in 1506 they begin a re-building project that will take 120 years, and result in the largest church in the world: St. Peter's Basilica. The altar sits directly above the grave of Peter, and over the altar someone decided to inscribe the words our Lord Jesus spoke to Peter in the gospel today, "You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church...and I will give you the keys of heaven."

The only problem was they didn't have the money to put anything up over the altar. So what did they do? Someone came up with the idea of selling tickets to heaven. Surely people would buy them! And they did. And the money paid for hanging Peter's words above the altar.

However, someone had the guts to call them on it. "You can't do that," Martin Luther said. "Jesus alone can save us." This led to the reformation, which eventually led to Martin Luther Lutheran Church right here in Giddings. So if it weren't for Peter's words, and for someone's desire to hang them up, and someone else's faith to call them on their questionable fundraising, chances are there would only be one church in town, and we'd all be over at St. Margaret's.

It's puzzling to wonder how one thing leads to another, how one interaction leads to another, how one domino impacts the next.

In life we often ask the "Why?" question: Why did this come to pass? Why is there suffering? Why is there death? Why is there drought?

I'd like to offer some reflections on those questions today.

To get there, I need to say that we were created to give God glory. It's what we are to be about. Giving God glory. And we do a lousy job of it.

Take any Christmas letter. You know, the ones you get with a big family update that makes

their family seem perfect and yours pathetic. “Ted’s got another promotion at work. Suzy somehow manages to keep the house perfect while volunteering with 26 organizations. Our oldest just finished up with the peace corps before squeezing in law school and some modeling work.” Fine news, but someone’s missing. It’s all about giving them glory, and giving no credit to God for the blessings He has given. God might as well be dead for all the mention He gets in some of the most blessed lives.

Our lives are filled with blessings from God, blessings upon blessings, grace upon grace. Yet so often we overlook the 99% blessing to focus on the 1% of our lives where blessings are withheld.

When some blessings are withheld, all of a sudden God gets mentioned quite a bit. I can’t go anywhere without somebody asking me why God isn’t sending us rain. When the drought turns up, or the hurricane comes, or the economy tanks, or the loved one dies, suddenly everyone wants to talk about God and what He’s up to.

Where was the conversation about God when life was going well? Then it was just about us, our beautiful ranches, our hard work, our strong nation. Then, there was plenty of talk about what we were accomplishing, and no mention of the gifts God was giving.

What if...and I’m not sure if I should say it this way, but I’ll try anyway...what if sometimes blessings are pulled back from us, so we are reminded where they come from. It’s almost as if God sometimes says, “You want to run a ranch without me, give it a try. You want to run a family without me, give it a try. You want to run a nation without me, good luck.”

Sometimes, it takes getting the rug pulled out from under us, for us to really get on our knees.

What is the most repeated line in the Bible? Do you know? It is simply this: “I am a jealous God.”

When you put your *self* before Him, God gets jealous. family / job / ranch / bank account / health / anything in the world

So what do we do? First we repent. We confess all the ways in which we have turned from acknowledging God’s provisions and pretended to make it just fine without Him. We say in prayer what God already knows: that we cannot make it on our own; we can’t get by without Him.

Then, what do we do? In suffering, when some of God’s blessings are withheld, it is the best time to give God the glory He deserves, so we join the confession of Peter and the confession of

Martin Luther, we join the church across time and the church across town, and together we confess: Jesus, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God." In you alone we place our hope. Amen.