

## Revelation 14:6-7

I learned last week about a Lutheran church in which the Elders instructed the pastor to stop reading the Bible in the worship services. It was felt that the Bible is offensive to some, and for the sake of gaining new members, and retaining the members they had, all Scripture readings were to be omitted, as well as any references to the Bible in the sermons. The pastor was to preach on spiritual topics, but was to base his preaching on sources other than the Word of God. I also learned that this is not an isolated case. Other churches are doing the same thing.

Now granted, churches like these are in the extreme minority. But considering the fact that this kind of thing is even taking place at all, we would be wise in making sure, by God's grace, that it never, ever happens here.

Just over one hundred years ago, the Titanic was sunk by an iceberg. And it is widely known now that if the ship had met the iceberg head-on, it would have survived. But because the ship veered away from the iceberg at the last minute, it was struck in the side and slashed in such a way that it sank to the depths of the ocean.

The iceberg is before us today. Will we run and hide? Will we turn tail and veer away, refusing to confront, in a God-pleasing way, the wicked schemes of the devil against us? What if Martin Luther had done that 500 years ago in Germany? What if he had veered away from the iceberg, refusing to confront it head-on with the Word of God? Would we even be Christians today?

The Battle Hymn of the Reformation that we just sang is located in that part of the hymnal entitled: *Church Militant*. Next Sunday we will be singing hymns from that part of the hymnal entitled: *Church Triumphant*. One week separates the day we celebrate the Reformation and the day we celebrate the saints triumphant who are at rest from their labors. But really, it's a lifetime. For as long as we have life and breath, we are in the fight. A soldier who lays down his weapons in the heat of the battle is a deserter. The day of rest is coming, but it is not yet.

We see deserters all around us, such as those churches who have laid down and set aside the sword of the Word of God. We see Christians who have laid down that same sword, neglecting to hear the Word of God in church, neglecting to read and study the Word of God at home. We are not in the Church Triumphant. We are still in the Church Militant. We are called upon as Christians to fight, to contend for the Faith, to meet the iceberg head-on and not veer away.

But we need help. We need assurance from God. More than that, we need Him to fight for us. It is His ship that we are on. The church does not float through life apart from His grace and strength. He is the Captain. He keeps us on course. But the iceberg is dead ahead of us in the water. Will our church survive?

Centuries ago when sailing ships spent months at sea without seeing dry land, sailors were encouraged when they spotted an albatross--a magnificent bird that flew overhead. The sailors believed that the albatross was a sign to them of good fortune. The albatross never landed. It could stay with a ship for a long time. And when it did, the sailors on that ship were cheerful and in good spirits even amid all the dangers in the sea that surrounded them.

Today in our first Scripture reading, we encounter such an albatross. One that stays with us to give us courage and comfort. Listen to Revelation 14:

*“Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people. And he said with a loud voice, ‘Fear God and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come, and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water.’”*

For 500 years, Bible scholars have agreed that this angel in Revelation 14--this messenger, this albatross--is Martin Luther. Now the man, Luther, is no longer with us. This albatross flew overhead for a time, but then he died and was buried. But God keeps raising up albatross after albatross to fly directly over the ship of His church, and we in His ship are encouraged.

And though the albatross that flies overhead; though the angels, the messengers come and go, the Gospel they proclaim is eternal. With that Gospel being loudly and clearly proclaimed, we can meet any obstacle, any iceberg that lurks in the sea, and we will survive.

But we must meet it head-on. If we lay aside the Catechism, the truths of God's Word; if we loosen our grip on our Baptism and the Supper of our Lord, we will sink to the depths.

This is not how Jesus met the cross on Calvary. He did not veer to the right or to the left. He walked directly to the cross and met it head-on. He did this for you. He did not turn away from the punishment of our sin. He walked face-first into hell--suffering on that cross the penalty we all deserve. He was on that ship alone. His disciples had deserted Him. Even the albatross flew away--even His Heavenly Father rejected Him. And though He sank to the depths and was buried, on the third day He rose again. He rose in triumph over His enemies. And this same Jesus has promised never to leave you nor forsake you.

And so His albatross remains with you. Every Sunday morning the pure, eternal Gospel is proclaimed by the albatross--that messenger of Christ--and you, the baptized, can meet the iceberg head-on and you will survive.

You do not need to shrink away when God's Law is preached. Jesus already met that iceberg for you. Yes, you and I are poor, miserable sinners. Yes, we deserve eternal punishment. But the iceberg cannot condemn you. Jesus was condemned in your place. Friend, God forgives you for Jesus' sake.

You and I do not need to fear when the devil assaults us with troubles and grief, with guilt and suffering. Look at your baptism into Christ. Look at the Lord's Supper before you on the altar. The albatross is still flying. Jesus' eternal Gospel is still with you. Your ship will not sink. God will preserve His church.

Let the icebergs come. We will not veer away. We will meet them head-on. "Though devils all the world should fill, all eager to devour us, we tremble not, we fear no ill; they shall not overpower us. For us fights the Valiant One; our victory He has won. The kingdom ours remaineth." Amen.