

Luke 10:38-42 10/27/13 (Reformation Day – Red Letters #7) **Letters That Rock the Boat**

Folks, let me ask you a question: Generally speaking, would you rather be on a boat in nice and peaceful waters,

Slide: peaceful boat

or one that is in the midst of a violent storm?

Slide: boat in storm

I think most of us would choose the peaceful boat. I suppose it's possible that some of you with a thirst for adventure would choose this one, but I think most of us would prefer the safety of a boat in peaceful waters.

Slide: Phil Robertson pic

In fact, have you ever been in a canoe with another person and the other person suddenly shifts and rocks the boat? It's an uncomfortable feeling isn't it. Most people don't like to have that feeling – whether they're in a boat or outside a boat. The problem is, when it comes to our lives, the avoidance of that feeling leads to an intense desire to keep things the same at all cost, because we don't like the fear or frustration or pain that comes with our boats being rocked.

That's natural. And it's true, sometimes when you rock the boat bad things can happen

Slide: nobody move art

So that tends to make you a little paranoid. Unfortunately, sometimes it also keeps you from changing some things that need to be changed, in you or in others around you. You don't have conversations you should have because you know that it might be uncomfortable. And you don't want to get into a fight, so you avoid it, and you avoid it, until you can't avoid it any more, but now it's become a pattern, a dysfunctional system, and the change for everyone is that much harder.

Well folks, quite simply, Jesus didn't have that problem. He was not a Divine doormat. And He was not afraid to rock the boat when that boat was going in the wrong direction. So today we talk about his Red Letters that Rock the Boat. Words He shared most often with the leaders of the church of His day that challenged the status quo; that shook up their worldview and forced them to look at life another way.

Starting with the first reading, Jesus answered a question about fasting. Now, in a Christian culture, we don't tend to talk a lot about fasting. We know it's not necessary to stop eating in order to pursue a relationship with God. But in Jesus' day that was a discipline that was almost routine. They tithed, they worshipped, they fasted. And for Jesus to challenge that in any way was beyond rocking the boat. He referred to Himself as the bridegroom.

Slide: “Jesus answered, “**How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast.**”

(Matthew 9:15 NIV)

And that's something he did a number of times, understanding that the Church is His bride. Folks, this is just one of many of the Red Letters, where if Jesus is not God, then this is an incredibly arrogant statement. He's literally saying that it is about Him. And it is. The Bible says

Slide: “For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.” (Romans 11:36 NIV)

So can you imagine, for us who worship Jesus Christ as the Son of God and our Savior... if we had Him here personally, physically? We wouldn't be fasting, we'd be celebrating. We'd be

enjoying His presence. And that's what He's saying here. But He goes further and talks about something else we're not familiar with, wineskins.

Slide: Wineskin

Wineskins were just what it says, an animal skin sewn up to hold wine. But when that skin gets old, you can't put a new patch on it. You have to start with a whole new skin. Again, Jesus is applying that illustration to Himself and telling everyone who would listen that they were face to face with something brand new, something much better, and they'd better deal with it. And folks, think about these Red Letters when it comes to you and me. Way too often we think of Jesus and His words like a patch, just another Ap among the other Aps on the iPhones of our lives. But Jesus isn't content with that. He didn't come just to patch up your life. He came into this world to make you brand new and whole. That's why He took every wrong thing in you and was punished for it on the cross and died for it so that you could be forgiven and clean and start over. He wants you to have a whole new life and **He** wants to be in every part of it.

In the next reading, Jesus rocked the boat on another tradition, hand-washing. Now hand-washing is big in our culture right?

Slide: Hand washing pic

We've seen those T.V. specials where they shine different kinds of light on our countertops and shopping cart handles and phones and we see all the disgusting bacteria on 'em and we feel like hand-washing is a good idea – especially before we eat. So why didn't the disciples do it?

Well the fact is, they did – that kind of hand-washing. But it turns out that what the Pharisees were talking was something different. It was a hand washing **according to the "tradition of the elders"**. And if you dig into the history of that, it turns out they were doing a last minute ceremonial washing just in case their hands had brushed against a Gentile or against something belonging to a Gentile, a non-Jew. So it wasn't a rule that God had, it was a tradition that the Jews had developed to keep themselves separate and untouched from the very people that God had chosen them to reach and touch. And Jesus would have none of it. He rocked their boat with these Red Letters:

Slide: "7 You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you:

8 'These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.

9 They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.'" (Matthew 15:7–9 NIV)

Wow. That's some serious boat-rocking. In other words, "Yeah, you look good on the outside, but not on the inside." This year I got to witness everything that goes into a homecoming dance for a high school girl. Hours of internet shopping and picking the dress and the shoes, nails and hair and makeup. Then it's getting together with friends and staging the different pictures now that they do look so good on the outside.

Slide: homecoming pic

It was fascinating to be a bystander to all of that. And a lot of it is just great fun for them...nothing wrong with that..., but think about it as a microcosm to life. We pay so much attention to our outside, Clothes, hair, the house, the yard, the car.. the behavior. We want our neighbors and friends to see how very good we are, but if that goodness hasn't reached our heart, none of it means anything.

And when that's going on in the church – when it's all about what's on the outside, about tradition and not about the Truth of God's Word, then our boat absolutely needs to be rocked. When we forget that the church is a spiritual hospital where people go to find healing and forgiveness, and instead turn it into a showplace, a place for holy schmoes, God has no choice but to rock that boat.

Now today we celebrate Reformation Day and we remember Martin Luther, this guy

Slide: Martin Luther pic

Not this guy

Slide: Martin Luther King jr.

This guy, Martin Luther King Jr. was the 1960's civil rights leader. This guy

Slide: Martin Luther

Was the 1520's reformer of the church, who on All Hallows Eve, October 31st of 1517 nailed 95 theses for debate on the door of the church at Wittenberg. 95 questions he had for the church of his day where they had gotten away from the words of God and fallen into the traditions of men. In fact, they had fallen exactly into the error of the Pharisees, and focused on the outside instead of on their hearts. In fact, they even developed a phrase to justify this attitude, called in Latin: **ex opere operato**, "on the basis of the work, worked." In other words, it doesn't matter what the condition of your heart is, it doesn't matter what's on the inside, as long as you get it right on the outside, as long as you go to confession and worship and receive the sacraments, it's all cool with God... Except that in very BIG Red Letters, Jesus is saying, "No, it's not. I don't just want what you do, I want you... heart and soul."

And of course, that transitions perfectly into the last reading with Mary and Martha, a reading many of us are very familiar with. We know that Martha was in the kitchen and Mary was at Jesus' feet. And Martha got ticked off that Mary wasn't helping and Jesus had to put Martha in her place. But again, I don't know if we are equipped to know just how much this scene would have rocked the boats of everyone involved. There is no question in the culture of that day, who was in the right and who was in the wrong. **Men** listened to the Rabbis, not women. **Women** belonged in the kitchen. Unfortunately a great portion of our world's population, particularly in the Middle-east, wants to keep it that way. But not Jesus. He welcomed and affirmed the choice of Mary to sit at his feet and listen to what He said, and declared that choice to be better.

Please don't misunderstand, it's not wrong to fix meals and clean up after meals. I mean, I don't want to mess with our potlucks, or with the Red Letter dinners that we're inviting you to attend in a couple of weeks, or with cookies and refreshments. But the point is, we can't let the preparations distract us from the main event, when that main event is Jesus. In fact, look at what that warped focus did to her: She ended up accusing Jesus of not caring about her and she started giving orders to the Son of God, the king of the universe.

Slide: "But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "**Lord, don't you care** that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? **Tell her to help me!**" (Luke 10:40 NIV)

Folks trust me, when you start trying to give orders to God, you need to have your boat rocked. And of course, we would never do anything like that, would we? // Would we? You've never ordered God around in prayer? God, my spouse is insufferable. Change him. Change her. God, my boss, my employee, my co-worker is a jerk. Do something about him.

God, my health stinks. Fix it, now. If we think about it, we might add “please...”

Folks, we need our boats rocked. We need to know that reformation starts with me. I am the one who needs to be reformed. And then we need to submit to the re-forming work of our Savior.

Slide: The Potter’s Hand

Are you moldable, pliable, surrendered? This moment can be a Big moment in your life if you let it. Is there something God can still do in your life? Folks, there’s two big-time mistakes we can make with all this. #1, we mistakenly reach the conclusion that we’ve arrived, we’re mature and we don’t have to be matured anymore. And #2, that it’s too late, we’re a hopeless case. Folks never call “hopeless” someone for whom God says He has a hope and a future. If you’re not dead, you’re not done. And when you choose what is better, the Red Letters of Jesus, when you choose to sit at his feet, it will not be taken away from you.

Lord Jesus, thank you for rocking our boats this morning. We needed that and we need that continually. But the process is uncomfortable at times, so help each of us to stop looking at somebody else and open up to Your re-formation of our lives. Amen.