

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Reformation Sunday - Year C

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Psalm 46

Romans 3:19-28

John 8:31-36

10/27/2019

Gospel

The Holy Gospel according to St. John:

31Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; 32and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." 33They answered him, "We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying, 'You will be made free'?" 34Jesus answered them, "Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. 35The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there forever. 36So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed."

The Gospel of our Lord.

Prayer

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

Reforming!

Good morning! Today is Reformation Day! Now, I realized something lately, not all of us are life-long Lutherans. Some of you, like my wife, have been stolen from the

Catholics, brought over to the dark-side, and others have grown up all sorts of different faith traditions. Raise your hand if you were not raised in a Lutheran Church. So that means some of us probably aren't familiar with the Reformation story, and if we're honest, some of us could probably use a refresher!

We date the beginning of the Reformation to 1517, but like all things, it's not that simple. But, because I doubt you want to hear a 45 minute sermon, I'll try and keep things short. A young Augustinian monk who was a professor at Wittenberg in Germany posted his 95 theses on the church door in town, a common enough action that was used to begin scholastic discussion. What made this one different was that the recent creation of the printing press was used to spread these points of discussion all across the area. Whether Martin Luther intended to cause this sort of trouble remains to be seen, but that's what happened.

Luther wanted to highlight the many problems that he saw in the church Catholic at the time. One of the most prevalent, and the one that usually gets the most attention, was the selling of indulgences. In an effort to raise funding for the completion of St. Peter's Basilica a strange trend was created in which you could pay to make sure your soul ended up in heaven... right... It didn't stop there though! "What about your family! Your parents passed away a few years ago didn't they?! Well you better buy their indulgence too!" To oversimplify, the man behind it, Johann Tetzel, was running this little service around the empire. And it's from him that we get the famous tag line, say it along with me, good Lutherans! "When the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs!"

This didn't fly well with Luther, and so he listed this, along with a few other things, as points of contention with the church at the time. But because this was the 1500's, complaints weren't well received by those in power. In 1521 Martin Luther was called to an imperial Diet, something that had nothing to do with food, in the city of Worms, a place that had nothing to do with the bug. At the Diet of Worms theological debate over his statements was undertaken, and Luther was given the chance to recant. To which he replied: *"Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason (for I do not trust either in the pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. May God help me. Amen."*¹ Strangely, Luther wasn't killed immediately, and so he got away. He was excommunicated, and over the next several years these protestors, or Protestants, grew in number until there was a major split in the church Catholic. So that's roughly 100 years of church history boiled down into 500 words.

Which brings us to everyone's favorite time, discussion! One of the major points of the Reformation was that we are a church that the Holy Spirit is ALWAYS reforming, it never stops. So, I want you to discuss with someone near you what you think the church needs to work on reforming now. What should or needs to change? We'll spend about five minutes on this, and I want you to write your ideas on the sermon feedback forms in the pews and put them in the offering plate so I can take a look.

Discussion for five minutes

¹ Brecht, Martin. *Martin Luther*. tr. James L. Schaaf, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985-93, 1:460.

Ok! I hope you found that helpful. But now I want to offer a few words of advice. If you noticed in the beginning of my sermon I asked who had been raised in a Lutheran church, NOT who had been born or baptized in a Lutheran church. The Reformation isn't about bashing other denominations, it has always been about a willingness to admit that the Holy Spirit is active and working in the church at all times. It's not about bashing the Catholics, we tend to demonize them in our stories, it's about realizing that God was and is just as active in the Catholic Church as God was in other places.

The Reformation is about realizing that we are sinners, and that by God's grace we somehow get to be a part of something amazing. It's about remembering that our disunity isn't something to be celebrated, but that we are called to work towards peace and unity. The Reformation is about making God's kingdom present here all around us, making God known, showing that love in a community that doesn't let differences lead to disunity. For us, here in this place, it's about fellowship and friendship as believers in the Triune God who saved us all. I end with one of my favorite prayers, written by Martin Luther: *"Behold, Lord, an empty vessel that needs to be filled. My Lord, fill it. I am weak in the faith; strengthen me. I am cold in love; warm me and make me fervent, that my love may go out to my neighbor. I do not have a strong and firm faith; at times I doubt and am unable to trust you altogether. O Lord, help me. Strengthen my faith and trust in you. In you I have sealed the treasure of all I have. I am poor; you are rich and came to be merciful to the poor. I am a sinner; you are upright. With me, there is an abundance of sin; in you is the fullness of righteousness. Therefore I will remain with you, of whom I can receive, but to whom I may not give. Amen."*²

² *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2006. p. 87.