

Reformation Sunday
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There was a young Lutheran pastor who was excited about preaching on Reformation Sunday for the first time, and he had all his notes together about the life of Luther, how Luther discovered we're made right with God by grace through faith, and how he nailed his 95 theses to the door of the castle church, and eventually stood up to the authorities of the church saying "Here I stand, I can do no other!" This young pastor wanted to share the truth as it had been made known to him. But just as he began to share his message he realized that his microphone wasn't working, and after fiddling with the switch to try to get power to no avail, he raised his hands saying, "There's something wrong with our sound system", to which the congregation replied..."and also with you!" You know you're Lutheran, a child of the Reformation, if you've heard that one before.

In our gospel reading for today, John recalls the words of Jesus, when Jesus said to those who had believed in him, "You know the truth, and the truth will make you free." He went on to assure those believers that those who truly are his followers and disciples, shall live in the household of the Son of God forever. The land we walk on won't last forever. It will continue to erode and to change as the climate changes. But the truth will never change! And the truth is; that Jesus Christ is Lord of all!

Ever since the dawn of history, we human beings have been on a quest for truth. The search for truth never ends. Yet, even the word...truth, defies explanation. Someone once remarked that philosophy seeks the truth, theology finds it, and religion possesses it. This may be so, but if it is, it's because acceptance of the real truth, relies solely on faith. When the world's first couple ate the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden, it was in part because the serpent encouraged Eve to challenge at least one creature's interpretation of truth. The serpent persuaded Eve to question God's wisdom and her own faith, thus our first parents discovered that the search for absolute certainty, will involve both curiosity to discover new and sometimes difficult things about ourselves, and the willingness to risk the time and energy that that search may require.

On this last Sunday in October, we, along with many other protestant churches celebrate the words and works of Martin Luther, whose search for truth, to know what was true and what was not true about the Christian faith, hatched the Reformation movement, a movement which had been emerging just under the surface throughout Europe for at least a century. Scholars and theologians desperately sought to place the Holy Scriptures in the hands, and in the homes, of all who wanted to read and study it. But the holy authorities stifled their efforts. They burned their manuscripts; they imprisoned and executed the translators. The church taught people to fear God in the worst sense of the word. And then the church used that fear to control the people, to get them to submit to the church and obey the teachings and rules of the church. Some churches still use that approach today. But by only emphasizing the law, we miss out on the freedom that comes from the Gospel.

Martin Luther cringed at the very idea of creating a movement or starting some new faith. He wanted a truth that would really set him free, and at the same time he desired to share it, to create a healthier Christian population, nurtured and educated in the Word of God from earliest childhood to old age. He realized that Scripture alone would guide believers confidently, through all life's joys and sorrows. All we will ever need is found in God's love and grace, and that lives in us, as we are nourished by the Word of God. Through all the difficult times in his life and career, Luther found his greatest comfort as he read and reread the assurances of the Apostle Paul of salvation by faith through grace alone.

Science and technology, and the wisdom gained from life itself, have taught us many truths. Medical breakthroughs, for example, show us how to keep from having strokes and heart attacks and how to prolong life. But the one truth that will set us free from all our fears of living and dying, has eluded most people. The absolute truth, which liberated Luther and which liberates all who believe it, is that Jesus Christ is Lord of all. This ultimate and awesome reality doesn't keep us from the fires and trials of our life journey; but it strengthens us and carries us safely through them and beyond them.

Martin Luther also discovered grace, defined as God's love and forgiveness freely given to an undeserving humanity, and this grace reinforced his belief in the Bible's promises of Christ's presence. Christ is with us, and was with Luther even in the darkest hours of his loneliness and isolation.

There is no doubt that at times, Luther feared for his life. After all, the church authorities not only wanted to excommunicate him, they wanted to execute him. But he did not fear for his soul, for his very being. He came to know and appreciate the freedom of trusting the Lord Jesus to be in and with him always.

The same truth frees us and motivates us for all the chores and the trials we experience every day. All we have to do is to believe that Jesus is our Lord. And that word believe; means to live by, to live by our conviction that Jesus is our Lord. Then we can submit our lives to Him, and find hope and nourishment from God's word, and from the visible presence of Christ made real in sacrament and song. When we come to know in our heart of hearts that Jesus will never abandon us, we can relax because we have discovered the certainty that matters most. You see, the real meaning and impact of this Reformation Sunday is the freedom that believing in Christ gives. You and I are free to allow God to embrace us as we discover the inner peace that leads to our true self.

In our gospel reading for today from John, Jesus says, "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free!" And one day as Luther was preparing for a series of lectures on Paul's letter to the Romans, chapter 3, a portion of scripture he had read many times before.

But this time as he read it, his eyes were opened, his mind was opened, the grace of God was revealed to him like never before. Luther said later, "it was as though the gates of heaven were opened to me!" He read:

But now, apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed...
Since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God;
They are now justified (put right with God) by God's grace as a gift
Through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus
For we hold that a person is justified by faith
apart from works prescribed by the law.

Suddenly Luther knew the truth of the gospel, suddenly Luther experienced the true grace of God, and suddenly after all this time Luther was set free!

Do you remember when you first experienced Grace like that?

Maybe it was when you were younger, when, as you were thinking about what Jesus did when he died on the cross, you felt something more than just compassion for his sacrifice for us, more than just empathy for his suffering, but you experienced something even more powerful.

Maybe you have had a born again experience where God's grace completely overwhelmed you, and you experienced with certainty, God's undeniable grace and love.

Maybe, like Luther, you have had more of an intellectual a-ha experience, where suddenly the words of scripture just grabbed you, and you experienced God alive in those words, full of grace, and you knew for an instant that this is the mind of God, that this is truth.

When Luther experienced that truth, he was set free! Luther was free from trying to make himself worthy and acceptable before God, something he never could achieve for himself, no matter how hard he tried!

He was free to simply rest in the grace and favor and love of God, grace and forgiveness freely given to us because of what Jesus Christ accomplished for us on the cross.

Luther rediscovered the gospel, the Good News of Jesus Christ. It had been right there in front of him all the time, but it had been hidden, obscured, covered over by centuries of misuse and tradition in the church.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, that same freedom is available to you and me right now as we claim Jesus as Lord of all, as we let go and let God lead our life. We are saved solely by the love and grace of God freely and generously given to us through the death

and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Salvation comes to us as a free gift of God's Grace. All we have to do is respond to it. All we have to do is accept that gift. The truth is yours, let it set you free. Amen.