

Reformation Celebration: November 4, 2018

Reformation Sermonettes

Sermonette #1. The Reformation Reminds us: Hold to the Truth of Scripture

✦ Scripture Lesson: Galatians 1:8,9 “But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! ⁹ As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!”

Why do we celebrate the Reformation every year? Why do we count its anniversaries? (501 in case you are keeping score). Why is it important for us sitting here today in a Lutheran church? The Reformation is important because without a Reformation, there would be no Lutheran church or churches of several other denominations either.

The Reformation is considered by many to be nothing more than a change of historical era or a change of behavior and thinking. They place the Reformation in the same category as the Renaissance, the Middle Ages, or the Enlightenment. But the Reformation was much more than just a change of era or thinking or pattern of behavior. The Reformation was and continues to be about our Savior, Jesus and the free and full forgiveness he gives.

The Holy Spirit was at work through the Reformation to bring the truth of the Gospel, that Jesus is our one and only Savior, back to the hearts and minds of men who had been living in spiritual darkness and blindness for many years.

To many, it might seem like the celebration is misplaced. It may seem like we are praising or worshipping a man named Martin Luther. We do talk about Luther, he is one of the leaders of the Reformation, but we do not praise or worship him any more than we praise or honor the apostles like Peter or Paul. What we are doing is standing in awe of our God and what he can do through regular people like you and me.

On this day, we are thanking God that he would send his Holy Spirit to work through men like Martin Luther, and the other reformers, to make sure that his Word is kept pure so that we, today, can hear and study the truth of the Gospel.

The Reformation reminds us that our religious truth is God’s Word alone. It reminds us that we, as God’s people, are to hold onto those truths of Scripture no matter what anyone says or teaches. Paul echoes God’s command to not add or subtract from that true Word in Galatians 1, “**But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! ⁹ As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!**” (Gal 1: 8,9)

Dear Christians One and All Rejoice is a hymn written by Martin Luther. As we sing the hymn this morning, we will not only see the heart of a sinful man yearning for the grace of God. But let’s also see more than that. Let’s also see our heart which also searches for a light in a world that has been darkened by sin.

As we sing the first 4 verses of hymn 377, look for all of the biblical truths that are listed in those verses. These are the just some of the truths of the God’s Word that the Holy Spirit brought back to his people during the Reformation.

Sermonette #2. The Reformation Reminds us: We are Sinners under God’s Law.

✦ Scripture Lesson: Psalm 51:5 . “Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.”

The Reformation reminds us to look to the Word of God for guidance in our whole life. It put the focus of salvation where it should be, not on the thoughts or actions of man, but on God’s clear teaching of the Gospel in his Word. The Reformation sought to teach people the correct understanding of the Law in God’s plan for us and the comfort of God’s grace and mercy shown through Jesus in the Gospel.

Simply, the Law shows us that we are sinful. Listen again to the verses of the hymn as Luther uses Law concepts straight from the Bible to describe our sinfulness.

Fast bound in Satan's chains I lay; Death brooded darkly o'er me. Sin was my torment night and day; In sin my mother bore me. Yet deep and deeper still I fell; Life had become a living hell, So firmly sin possessed me.

My own good works availed me naught, No merit they attaining; My will against God's judgment fought, No hope for me remaining. My fears increased till sheer despair Left naught but death to be my share And hell to be my sentence. (CW 377 V. 2,3)

The Bible teaches us that we are born in sin. **“Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.” (Ps 51:15)** By nature we are blind, dead and enemies of God. By nature, we are prisoners of sin, death and the devil. Because of our sinfulness, we cannot attain God’s standard of perfection. We cannot be perfect as he demands. We hear God’s Word say loudly in our ears, **“Whoever keeps the whole Law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.” (James 2:10)** We understand that. We know that we are sinners who have broken more than just one point of God’s Law.

Because we are sinful have nothing to offer God, nothing that we can bargain or barter with, nothing that we can bring to God as an offering to him that can satisfy his standard of perfection, as Luther says in verse two, **“we have no hope remaining.”** If we remain in this sinful, unrepentant, unbelieving state our whole life, eternal damnation is our only sentence, we have nothing to look forward to.

But God is gracious and does not want anyone to die and go to hell. He shows us how much he loves us. His face of mercy turns to us and his mercy pours out on those who could not meet his standard of perfection. He loves his rebellious children and promised from the time of the first sin that he would send a Messiah to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. This Messiah would meet that standard of perfection with perfect living. He would take away the sins of the rebellious children and provide for them a home with him in heaven.

He showed us his great love by sending us a Savior from sin to give us the help that we needed so that we do not go through life in despair and depression with no hope. Jesus obeyed his Father’s plan perfectly for us. Our God became a servant for us that we might become children and heirs of eternal life. We sing of the perfect plan of God to send his Son to redeem the world in verses 5 and 6.

Sermonette #3. The Reformation reminds us: We are saved through Jesus, alone.

✦ Scripture Lesson: Romans 3: 21,22. ²¹ But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ²² This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.

✦ 2 Corinthians 5:19 ¹⁹ God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them.

Imagine for a moment that you do not know that God’s love. Imagine that when you hear John 3:16, you do not think about the part of the passage that says all who believe will be saved, instead you only hear the part that talks about condemnation. Imagine that the religion that you God’s Word is a club that hits you over and over again with the news that you are not good enough because you have not obeyed God’s Law.

Imagine that when you had fears and worries about the love of God you were told to try harder. How would you feel when you tried harder, but you still realized that something was wrong? What would you do if you were scared of an angry God?

The church of the Middle Ages had drifted from the truths of the Gospel. Instead of looking for God’s guidance in his Word, the church of the middle ages used the Word less and less and relied more and more on the teachings of men.

This led the church away from the preaching the Gospel. The church had added many things to the truth of God’s Word. They had fallen into following a different teaching than the one that the Bible preached. This gospel of the Middle Ages was really no gospel at all, it was teaching of obedience and working your way to heaven. The Gospel is the good news of what Jesus has done, not a message of frustration because of works. If a person was good enough, they could get into heaven.

This type of teaching led Martin Luther to be afraid of a just God who saw his good deeds, but also saw all the sins that he committed. Martin understood a truth that not many people want to face, if God kept a record of good, he must also keep a record of sin. Martin knew he sinned much more than he has been good.

With this type of God, there was no hope and comfort. Even though his teacher and priest told him that God was loving and merciful, Martin did not see that love because he was not being taught the Gospel of Jesus.

It was here that God did something amazing. God put a teaching in Martin's life who gave him an assignment: search the Scriptures to find the loving and merciful God of the Bible. It was during many months of studying that Martin returned again and again to the Bible in the library of the monastery. It was through this Word that the Holy Spirit worked to show him the true Gospel.

It was in the writings of Paul that the Holy Spirit opened Martin's eyes to the fact that God did not demand perfection or obedience to the Law. Salvation was through Jesus and not through works. In Romans, Martin found.... **"But now a righteous from God, apart from the law, has been made known to which the Law and Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. (Romans 3:21-24)**

In Ephesians, Martin found the clear and simple Gospel of salvation by grace through faith, **"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith, and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast." (Eph 2: 8.9)**

In Paul's letters, Martin finally found the truth that it was God who saved him. He did not have to strive to please God through works, God already loved him and had sent a Savior to save him.

The Holy Spirit led Luther to discover that his salvation was a great gift from God. That's was we discover in the Reformation as well. We see these Gospel truths that God has done this in love, to save us. He sent Jesus to the cross to win that forgiveness for us and he gives that to us as a free gift. In his great love Jesus set sinners free and now sinners like you and me can have hope and comfort through Jesus.

In the next three verses of our hymn, we hear that Gospel message as though Jesus were telling us himself what he has done.

Sermonette #4. The Reformation Reminds us: Never let go of the precious Gospel.

✦ Scripture Lesson: John 20:31. These (the Scriptures) are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God and that by believing you may have life in his name."

Are we in danger of losing the blessings of the Reformation? Are we in danger of losing the focus on the Law and its place in our life, but more importantly the saving Gospel? Yes, the devil, the world and our own sinful flesh are at war daily to try to change that Gospel from the truth that gives eternal life to another Gospel that is more pleasing to our ears, that requires more of us. If we change that Gospel even a little bit, we chip away at the assurance that only the Gospel can bring us through Jesus.

What teachings will we follow? John writes: **These (the Scriptures) are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God and that by believing you may have life in his name." (John 20:31)**

Jesus himself says, **"If you hold to my teachings you are really my disciples, then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free. (John 8:31)**

After going through a time when people did not look to Scripture as their only source of religion and truth, Luther gives this advice. "Go to the Scriptures, dear Christians! Go there alone, and let my exposition and that of all other teachers mean no more to you than the scaffolding on a building, so that we might understand the simple, pure Word of God, believe it as our own, and hold it fast."

We don't have to wait 501 years to rededicate ourselves to the truths of God's Word. This is a Reformation that sinful people need to make every day. When Jesus asked his disciples if they were going to leave him to follow another message, their answer should also be our answer, **"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." (John 6:68)** The truth of our salvation through Jesus is not found anywhere else. The truth that leads to heaven cannot be found anywhere else than in Scripture.

The focus of the Reformation is not on Martin Luther, the focus of the Reformation is on our one and only Savior Jesus and what he has done to fully and freely forgive us and open heaven for us. May we continue to focus on the Word which teaches us this amazing truth of God's grace to us. We sing of that focus to which we hold in the last verse of the hymn.