

Reformation Weekend
October 28 & 29, 2023
Reformation Matters
John 8:31-36

Today we celebrate Reformation Day, even though it's not till Tuesday, we remember it together today! And we got started with it even earlier than this weekend! We began earlier in the week with Faith Lutheran School Chapel!

We welcomed little Luther who had some thoughts on the 95 thesis and the importance of sharing God's truth in this world! We had the kids singing the Reformation Polka and Peter, Paul and Mary's homage to Hammers and Bells for Danger, Warning, Love between the Brothers and the Sisters; for Justice and Freedom; which for me is personified perfectly in the ideals of the Reformation. Luther took out his hammer, nailed the 95 thesis on the church door at Wittenberg and the world *was warned* about the *dangers* of not following God's Word, the only thing that can grant everyone true *Justice and Freedom*.

On a continent ravaged by war and the collateral damage that comes with it, Luther proved the *pen is indeed mightier than the sword*, writing his way to notoriety and loosening the grip the Pope had on the peasants of Germany. The result was a revolution that only our Lord saw coming and would change the world forever!

From that we celebrate the three truths that alone must be known. Grace Alone, Faith Alone, and Scripture Alone!

This is our message of hope for a hopeless world.

Last week in 8th grade religion we began our discussion on the means of grace. As an introduction to the material, I asked the students to draw a picture of the greatest gift they ever got. Then I asked them to tell me what the greatest gift would be that they could ever get in the future!

One of my thoughtful students asked me if she could wish for Peace! I must admit, it made me reflexively chuckle, but I quickly responded, "Of course you can wish for peace", knowing she was probably as troubled by the conflict in the Middle East as we all are!

Unfortunately, peace has never been achieved in the history of our World for any generation. Regardless of where you are in the world, there has been conflict. So much so, that they say that after the Third World War, the Fourth World War will be fought with sticks and stones.

Such is the sinful human condition.

This is why the hope we have is more important than any man-made hope ever was and ever will be. Luther rediscovered it in his reading of Habakkuk 2:4 and translating the New Testament into the vernacular of the common man, German. Habakkuk 2:4b specifically says, "The righteous shall live by his faith."

This freed Luther overnight from the tyranny of the law the church was falsely burdening every believer with! Luther realized this was true freedom in the Gospel, it was no longer about what you did for salvation, it was all about what Christ did on the cross for your salvation. Now, you need not look at your sins which condemn you, you need only look at the cross which forgives you!

In our Gospel today Jesus is talking to Jews who were somewhat waffling back and forth on whether to believe in Jesus' Words of redemption for their souls. In John 6:54 many of these same Jews were grumbling because Jesus Words were hard to believe with him saying, "Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day!"

It seemed impossible for them to believe but for us who have digested His Word for 2000 years, it is the obvious "...two-fold eating of Christ's flesh. One is spiritual, which Christ describes in John 6:54. This 'eating' happens in no other way than with the Spirit and faith, in preaching and meditation on the Gospel, as well as in the Lord's Supper."

(FC SD VII 61)

Or, as in John 3:3-5, with Nicodemus who struggled with Jesus' Words that you can be born again. Nicodemus' incredulous reply, "How can a man be born again when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb?"

Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."

So easy for us who digest God's Word every time we come together, but so hard for those who simply could not trust Jesus at his word quite yet.

As Augustine, the early church father commented, saying that, "We are born spiritually then, and in spirit we are born by the Word and Sacrament." Then we know that "In the first place, we take up Baptism, by which we are first received into the Christian Church." (LC IV 2) And we know that "Reason and free will are able to live an outwardly decent life to a certain extent. But only the Holy Spirit causes a person to be born anew [John 3:5] and to have inwardly another heart, mind, and natural desire" (FC SD II 26)

Like Jesus said so eloquently in our Gospel today, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free."

For 1700 years we have *documentably* known God's Word and had it in its present form that we use it today! We also know that it was available in the Old Testament for nearly 1,000 years before that in its present form to this day. So, Jesus knew we would have what we needed right up until The Reformation Period. That was when many were not able to read it in their language and the church no longer tried to make it accessible to them.

Now, you think we would have learned the lesson of the Reformation and made sure that everyone had access to the Gospel since then. Well, Kip Sandersfeld, our 4th Grade homeroom and Math Teacher, shared a wonderful devotion from Lutheran Hour Ministries this week that demonstrated we didn't learn anything at all.

It said, “Can you imagine anyone so depraved that they would choose to hide the Gospel from another human being? Something like this happened in the 1760’s, when certain people wanted to stop others from translating the Bible into the Gaelic language used in the Scottish Highlands. Why? Political reasons aimed at keeping the local people down. The great scholar, Dr. Samuel Johnson, wrote them a scathing letter when he heard of it, asking, ‘...is this the way they loved their neighbors?’ The men became ashamed of themselves, and the translation went forward.”

(www.lhm.org/dailydevostext/default.asp?date=202331024)

Oh, but pastor, we do so much better in the 21st century than those backwards Christians from the 18th Century. Are you sure about that?

Right here in Central Florida there is a huge ministry that claims to be about God’s Word. But, they literally tell their people that the apostolic prophecy of the spoken word is interfered with if you pay attention to the written word, as they believe their personal spoken word is more important than the bible! And these are supposed to be Christians!!!

But we need not wag our tongues across the theological spectrum as if we are better than them! After all, how many times have people contradicted the bible in *our* presence and we said nothing? How many times have we watched people embrace lifestyles whose choices were at odds with God’s Word? How many times have we simply kept our mouths shut when people honestly said, “There isn’t anything wrong with that is there?”, knowing full well it could not have been more offensive to our Father in Heaven? I know I have, and I know many of you, may have, too. So, we need this Reformation, too. We need to stop waffling on the reality of who God is and what His Word clearly says, and tell the truth in love.

It was the summer of 1987 when I was having the time of my life in Littleton, Colorado. We had a youth program that had as many as 50 High Schoolers in Sunday School every Sunday from our three area Littleton Public schools. At least 10 of them were from Lutheran High in Denver.

If we had a trip to Water World or Elyse Gardens Amusement Park; the old one, not the new fancy one there now, we could get as many as 80-100 in attendance. We had softball, basketball, and volleyball Lutheran church leagues, Bible study during the week. There was camping in the mountains, the Sand Dunes National Monument, and lots of fun amidst it all. It was so much fun, we would almost always invite friends from school that were not members of the church, and that’s how our numbers swelled to over a hundred for some activities. But no matter what we did, our youth leader, Jack Lipski, always made sure everything we did had a spiritual component to it. Devotion, communion, and prayer were always at the center of everything we did.

And this was in the glory days of the church. Most everyone we knew was Christian, in fact we were surprised when we invited someone that was a friend at school that was not a Christian. It was so rare, I only remember it happening one time while I was in high school. His name was John. Just the nicest kid that many of us knew from my High School Band Program at Heritage High School. Needless to say, he came along because we told him how much fun it was. And it was! He joined the softball team, he came to the Chatfield Reservoir with us to water ski, and he even went on a couple of camping trips.

Well, the camping trips were special, spiritually speaking. We would have full communion services, we would all have our parts in it, and of course all of it came from God's Word that we brought with us in the form of special bibles designed to be used in all weather conditions.

None of us ever picked up that John never said much, didn't have his own special bible, and simply listened without really participating while we worshipped. Even if we did, we would not have cared. Some were like that, and he wouldn't stick out for doing so.

Finally, one day, we realized there was a totally different reason why he did that. He actually didn't know who Jesus was or understand why we kept talking about how comforting it was for us that Jesus died for our sins.

So, he asked Jack quietly, one time after a softball game, and for the first time I saw witnessing with the Word of God in action. I saw the look on John's face as he put it all together. I watched how the Holy Spirit revealed the truth of the salvation for his soul, won for him on the cross by Jesus, his Savior. Right there, I realized was John's Epiphany, John's Holy Ghost Moment. That was John's revelation which led to his reformation!

If you think the Reformation doesn't really matter today. Just remember, it mattered to John.
AMEN

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