

Reformation Sunday – C
October 30, AD 2022

Thornhill Lutheran Church, Thornhill
Pastor Peter Lisinski

“Reformation, Reconstruction, Renewal”

(Texts: Isaiah 1:10-18; Psalm 32:1-7; 1 Thessalonians 1:1-12; Luke 19:1-10)

For most of the last two years of the COVID 19 pandemic, the road that leads to our church has undergone major reconstruction. Until recently I religiously avoided the axel-bending potholes and back-breaking bumps strategically scattered on its long and winding rocky path. But a few weeks ago, in a moment of weakness, curiosity got the better of me and I decided to do my own drive-through inspection. Big mistake! A trip that normally takes less than five minutes, took almost half an hour of bobbing and weaving through a combat zone of dump trucks, cranes, bulldozers and other assorted armored vehicles, guided by sentinels in fluorescent orange and yellow uniforms wearing helmets wielding “Stop” signs!

But my nerve-racking wilderness sojourn suddenly dissolved in an oasis of divine grace when the license plate on the vehicle ahead caught my eye: “3-0-2-L-B-W”. I have never heard the gospel proclaimed more eloquently than in the words of my *very* favourite of *all* my favourite hymns of our Lutheran heritage – Hymn # 302 in our Lutheran Book of Worship (LBW): “*Jesus, Your Blood And Righteousness.*”

The text was written by Nicolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf – identified in our *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* book’s calendar of “Lesser Festivals and Commemorations” as a “Renewer of the Church”. And that is exactly what we celebrate on Reformation Sunday – renewal of the church. “Saint” Nicolaus was born on May 26, 1700 to an devout, aristocratic Lutheran family in Dresden, Germany. By age twenty he had become disillusioned with his privileged social status as “*Count*” von Zinzendorf, and resigned his appointment as a government official in the public service, due to “irreconcilable differences” with his Christian conscience.

In 1722 refugees from Moravia, fleeing religious persecution, prevailed upon his reputation of Christian hospitality and wrote to him requesting permission to settle on his property, to which he readily agreed. The new community came to be known as “Herrnhut”, which means “The Lord’s Watch”. Soon other Protestant refugees, including Lutherans, settled there and Landlord Nicolaus began to serve the community, informally, as a resident chaplain, promoting mutual prayer and confession, writing hymns and lecturing on spiritual matters. After several years of lay ministry, Nicolaus began studies for ordained ministry.

Upon receiving his official Lutheran credentials, he continued to serve the Herrnhut community, and in 1738 he accepted the call to serve as the first Bishop of the newly organized United Brethren Church, better known as the Moravian Church – with whom our own Evangelical Lutheran Church In Canada recently began to explore a “Full Communion” partnership. This strikes me as a rather amusing irony, since suspicion of Bishop von Zinzendorf’s Christian orthodoxy led Lutheran church officials in eighteenth century Saxony to revoke his certification and expel him from their territory. Notwithstanding, over the next ten years the exiled bishop travelled extensively – at his own expense – establishing mission congregations in Europe and England, and eventually also among African slaves in the colonies of America. Brother Nicolaus was eventually permitted to return home, and spent the rest of his life – and money – serving the Moravian church. He died on May 9, 1760, less than three weeks shy of his sixtieth birthday.

Throughout his life, as a noble count, civil servant, lay chaplain, ordained pastor, consecrated bishop, Christian missionary, renewer of the church and hymn writer, Nicolaus *exemplified* our Lutheran understanding of the gospel, clarified in our church’s Augsburg Confession (Article 4), in accord with Apostle Paul: “We are freely *justified* and become righteous before God *by grace*, for *Christ’s* sake, *through* faith, when we believe that Christ suffered for us and that, by his death, has made satisfaction for our sins.”

Nicolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf’s *life*, affirms the gospel truth *enshrined* in his inspiring and insightful hymn, “3-0-2-L-B-W”: No matter how firm our faith may be – and his faith resume is formidable; no matter how many good works we may do – and his good works resume is formidable, no one has enough faith or does enough good to be justified in God’s sight. In the end, it is *only* God’s *grace* that *can* justify, *has* justified, and *will* justify, *us* and *all* God’s faithful saints and servants, through the crucified and risen Jesus Christ *alone!*

Truly good news as we continue to walk the long and winding rocky road out of the COVID 19 pandemic and into the combat zone of wars and rumours of wars, epic natural disasters of climate change, and humanitarian catastrophes of hunger and homelessness, as well as the assorted personal bumps and potholes of the major reconstruction of the world going on around and within us. But Nicolaus von Zinzendorf’s glorious hymn, remembers, reminds, and renews us in the faith that, come what may, through it all we have the presence of God’s love, the power

of God's Holy Spirit, and the promise of God's future, established in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, to sustain and guide us in our eternal life. ...

(Note: If possible, the hymn could be sung by the congregation as Hymn of the Day to conclude the sermon (the tune is "Oh, Jesu Christe, Wahres Licht, also found in ELW at # 675); otherwise the sermon would conclude with the reading of the hymn text below. God bless you all!)

Jesus Your Blood And Righteousness (LBW, # 302; translation by John Wesley)

"Jesus, your blood and righteousness my beauty are – my glorious dress!

'Mid flaming worlds, in these arrayed, with joy shall I lift up my head.

"Bold shall I stand in that great day, cleansed and redeemed – no debt to pay;
for by your cross absolved I am from sin and guilt, from fear and shame.

"Lord, I believe your precious blood – which, at the mercy seat of God
pleads for the captives' liberty – was also shed in love for me.

"Lord, I believe were sinners more than sands upon the ocean shore,
you have for all a ransom paid – for all a full atonement made.

"When from the dust of death I rise to claim my mansion in the skies,
this then will be my only plea: 'Christ Jesus lived and died for me.'

"Then shall I praise you, and adore your blessed name forevermore,
who once, for me and all you made, an everlasting ransom paid."