

REFORMATION SUNDAY-October 27, 2024

Introduction into the themes for the day We might take comfort in Luther's phrase that the church is always reforming—then again re-forming requires changing form sometimes and it requires some good old fashioned repentance too. A distilled bit of Luther's theology might encourage us—God does the reforming and the changing because most of it is truly beyond us.

Prayer of the Day-Almighty God, we thank you that your Holy Spirit renews the church in every age. Pour out your Holy Spirit on your faithful people. Keep them steadfast in your word, protect and comfort them in times of trial, defend them against all enemies of the gospel, and bestow on the church your saving peace, through Jesus Christ, our Saviour and lord, who live and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

GOSPEL: John 8:31-36. New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition

True Disciples

31 Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, **32** and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." **33** They 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'?"

34 Jesus answered them, "Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. **35** The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there forever. **36** So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.

Sermon:

We might think that Martin Luther's bold pronouncements and teaching meant the Reformation was all done and dusted and we live happily ever after. Frankly some of us are squeamish about our history as church—sadly Luther sided with the aristocracy when the poor cried for justice and thousands died when the wealthy crushed the peasant's resistance. If there's any freedom for today's church it will come in doing what Luther says: 'calling a thing what it is'. We also have to own up to the religious warfare just after Luther's life time...again people died. The church that evolved after Luther's time was also one in Nazi Germany that supported the Third Reich—and millions died. In each horrific case we became enemies of the Gospel when we side with the powerful.

Even now the church as it re-shapes and re-forms needs God's liberation to make that happen. So we pick up right where we left off last week—The church is free from death and free for life. It's worth repeating the quote that concluded last week's sermon: "Now that we know death doesn't have the last word, we are free to do more with our lives than just preserve them."(W. Boumann)

Today is the perfect day to revisit our calling as church; a calling issued in baptism. Here we proclaim what God frees us from and for. Dr. Anna Madsen told a story during our consultations about Hope for churches struggling with grief and bewildering change. She said she had a group of clergy review the statement of faith in our baptism liturgy—the part where we renounce. Even after inspiring words she said most mumbled a bit half heartedly the things we are called to renounce. We may have lost the spirit of the typical two year old when we say No...we don't stamp our feet or holler "no" when we renounce all the forces that defy a liberating and loving god. We don't dig in our heels when we renounce the so systems and structures of power when the powers that be rebel against God's vision of shalom. We don't balk when we renounce the ways of our own self preoccupation draw us from God's work in the world.

What if a big and often ignored part of our call to baptism is the call to resist things as they are and to invest our energy in embodying shalom for everybody? I am reminded of some of the reading I've done recently on the subject of hope. St. Augustine writes that Hope has two daughters-Anger...anger at the way things are that don't align with shalom and courage...courage to move ahead even when we're frightened and uncertain—Dr Madsen told another story when she heard again the quote from Augustine. “Remember the locked room where people knew only death? Remember Jesus showing up, breathing Spirit upon them? Remember Jesus speaking peace? Remember Jesus telling his followers, “now get back out there?”

As we explore the better things we have to do with our lives it's vital to remember this journey isn't a solo effort—as my beloved former bishop Elaine Sauer likes to say, “We have God. We have each other...so that means we have all we need.” Ah, to be free indeed. Amen.