

Sermon October 25th, 2020

God's Gift of New Life for Us

Today, and throughout the week, many Lutheran Christians will gather across the globe to commemorate the day, October 31st, 1517 to be exact, when a person by the name of Martin Luther took a chance, and posted a number of reforms for the church on a door of a cathedral that he wanted the Pope and Cardinals to consider **(Image)**. Triggering an era in European history called the Reformation.

The Reformation, being a period within the church and within society where major changes were happening throughout Europe. Changes that were overdue as more and more people were struggling with the conditions they faced, and with the leadership's decisions around handling these conditions. Changes that tried to help people find healing and redemption from their suffering, but also, changes that unfortunately came with grave consequences.

From the peasant's revolt that led to mass violence between the people and the church leadership. To the church leaders who were excommunicated for speaking out. To the demonization of the leadership of the church including the Pope, which led to abuses and even death for some priests. To vandalization of many churches, as people tried to rid the churches of what they perceived as idols and other artifacts. To the eventual mass division that occurred within the church **(Image)**. Leading to several what we call Protestant churches popping up all over Europe.

Today, as we face our own Reformation, not only as a church, trying to redefine ourselves in a world where less and less people are walking through our doors. But, also, as a society, where more and more people are struggling with the conditions we face today. We reflect on the Reformation over 500 years ago, and the challenges that came with trying to change things. We reflect on the consequences we face when standing up for change today.

Like, the push back from the current power structures in place when we stand up and voice our concerns about the major issues in our world. Or, trying to redefine our image as the church in a world that still sees us as ancient, traditional, and out of touch with the people of today **(Image)**. Even as we begin to tear down some of those walls that kept people away for so long. We see how hard it was to implement change during Luther's life time, and we see that not much has changed in this regard today.

So, it is easy for us to see the consequences of pushing for change in our church and our society. But also, we see the new life that God breathes into our lives through these periods of Reformation. Or in other words, we see God's gift of new life rising up from the ashes of what was **(Image)**.

As we reflect on the Reformation of the 1500s, we remember Martin Luther, and how some of the points he made were so freeing for many to hear. Like, understanding God as a merciful and gracious God whose invitation into the kingdom is a gift with no strings attached. What a relief from the message the people were used to hearing. That God is wrathful, and that you need to be a certain way or do certain things to feel confident in your salvation and the salvation of your loved ones.

Because of Luther's word, the people didn't need to live in constant guilt and fear of God's wrath anymore. They could trust in God's gracious gift of new life offered to them through Christ Jesus. They could trust that God was present with them during their suffering. Loving them and lifting them up. Empowering them to be Christ's disciples. To listen to and follow Christ's teachings. To love God and neighbor. Instead of thinking that God is inflicting this suffering on them. Bringing them down. Compelling them to live in fear.

Luther's thinking around God's grace as a gift that we receive through Christ Jesus spread through the church like a brush fire. Encouraging many to live in this freedom as John says. Freedom to love, because they no longer felt burdened by guilt and fear. Freedom to change, because they believed God was present with them, and would breathe new life into their communities. Freedom to be like Christ. Standing with the marginalized (**Image**). Stretching a hand out to those living in poverty. Pointing people to the healing and redemptive words and actions of God. There was indeed new life that came out of the Reformation.

Luther's thinking was inspired by the words we hear this morning from Jeremiah and Paul. Two leaders who were dealing with Reformations in their time period. Jeremiah says, God makes a new covenant with us. God's words are now written on our hearts through the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit that points us to Christ where we see that God's mercy endures forever.

In Romans, Paul says, we all fall short of the glory of God, and yet, through Christ Jesus we are welcomed into God's kingdom. Through no effort of our own, but because we believe that Jesus came to reconcile us to our Creator. That through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, nothing will separate us from the love of God.

As, we face our own Reformation today, we are reminded of the freedom we receive in Christ. The freedom to continue to change into the people God created us to be. People who love God and neighbor in every time and place.

We are reminded that God is merciful and full of grace when we sometimes stumble and fall when trying to be Christ's hands and feet in the world.

We are reminded that like Luther's time, there are many people today who are looking towards God, and God's people for love, compassion, and understanding. That people long to experience God's healing and redemption during periods of Reformation.

We are reminded that like the Reformers in and around Luther's time, we too will see new life rising up from the ashes. We will see new trees sprouting from the ground **(Image)**. We will see a renewed world. A renewed church.

And so, today we commemorate the Reformation that happened over 500 years ago, as we stand in the midst of our own Reformation. Hoping and praying, like the Reformers that came before us, that out of this Reformation will come new life.

Let us pray, gracious God, we give thanks for Martin Luther and others, past and present, who brought forth changes that have reshaped our faith in new and meaningful ways. We pray that you stand with us as we face the challenges that come with Reforming our church and our society. Give us hope that we will experience new life from the ashes. That we will experience new life from this Reformation we are experiencing in the 21st century. **Amen.**

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