

“Freedom and Reformation” John 8:36 Oct. 25,2020 @ Hope

Today, **Lutherans around the globe celebrate the Reformation.** Ordinarily this is a “*pull out all the stops*” day of worship, with processions, choirs and trumpets. Today. Thanks to Covid-19 we must content ourselves with a more modest setting. But this should not keep us from celebrating our heritage, remembering Martin Luther and his courageous stand against the excesses and abuses of 16th century Catholicism. This is acknowledged even by secular historians as a turning point in the western world. We owe Luther and the other reformers a great debt of gratitude for their timeless contributions:

- a) **An open Bible**, translated in to the language of the common man.
- b) **The priesthood of all believers**, every Christian given access to God without need for mediators..
- c) The **central place of preaching** in worship.
- d) An **understanding of vocation**..awareness that a mother raising her children is doing the Lord’s work just as much as a priest doing liturgy,
- e) Above all, **the grace alone, faith alone** principle, insisting that we are saved only by the merits of Christ, without the works of the Law. As St. Paul says so clearly (Epis.) **our righteousness comes from God, through faith in Jesus Christ.** We are clothed with His righteousness.

There is **much to remember and celebrate, but we surely want to get beyond remembrance and celebration.** As we Lutherans are fond of asking...” *What does this mean?*” How does our Reformation heritage impact our lives today? We want **to capture a spirit, an attitude, a way of thinking that make clear that we get the message, that we understand the implications.** In large part, you can boil it all down to one powerful word...**FREEDOM!** You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free! ***If the Son shall make you free, you are free indeed!***

What does it mean to be free? Let me approach this from a little different perspective. .Jerimiah 31....*I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel. I will put my Law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts. I will forgive their iniquity and remember their sin no more.*”

This New Covenant has to do with INTERNAL MOTIVATION. Being FREE from external demands and requirements. A law written in the heart, derived from the principle of grace, a response to God’s gifts in Christ.

I want to make my **point here through a broad analogy.** It seems to me that this new covenant is what parents strive to establish with their children. In good,

nurturing families there is something that happens very quietly and gently between parents and children in the growing up process. It's hard to tell exactly how and when it takes place, but as children mature you reach a kind of cross-over point when everyone knows that a new day has arrived.

When children are young, parents typically set up a whole set of rules to live by, some are well-spoken and defined, others unspoken but yet clearly understood. Like what kind of language is tolerated, what sort of activities are encouraged, the place of religion in the home, the value of education, how one handles competition and loss, how one manages money, etc. There are many rules and they often change. A 14 year old is parented quite differently than a 3 year old. In the teen years there is more freedom, more choices. Along the way there are always behavioral problems which bring the charge of irresponsibility. *"You are old enough to know better!"* There is always a strong temptation for parents to go back to the rule book.. to lay down the law. But the hard fact is that at some point the child begins to *"move away from home."* This often happens in spirit a long time before the emerging adult has a new address. It can be a stressful time. But it is not necessarily a rejection of the values and principles of the home, but simply a sign that the child feels the he has learned enough to function with freedom to make his own decisions. And assuming that the values of life have been well taught and a sense of trust has been established between parent and child, then the old rules will, in fact, become internalized and become a way of life apart from external rules.

Now this process can sometimes be rather painful. Parents have as much trouble living with this new covenant, setting children free from the constraints of law, as children have difficulty using their freedom responsibly, making wise decisions. But when it fully evolves, it really is a lovely thing. There is a new kind of relationship, filled with respect and caring...without parental domineering, without childish rebellion.

Now, analogies always are imperfect, but it seems to me that this is a fairly accurate way to describe how God guides his people in the New Covenant..*"not like the old covenant, when I took them by the hand,...in the new day "the Law is written within them, written upon their hearts."*

In no small way, **the Reformation of the 16th century was a recapturing of this principle..** a powerful restating of our relationship with our Father-God. The church of young Luther was dominated by a kind of legalism which struck fear and trembling in the minds of God's people. It stymied any mature, joyful response to

God's mighty actions in Christ. Luther's proclamation of "**grace alone, faith alone, Scripture alone**" was really nothing more than a restatement of the New Covenant that God offers in Christ. Past failures are fully and freely forgiven by a gracious Father who counts us righteous thru the sacrifice of His Son. **This is the truth the sets us free! Freedom! What a powerful, wonderful word.**

Free to live, **first, with a wonderful confidence and trust in our relationship with our Father.** We will never be abandoned. We are his own dear children. His promises will never be broken. (Much like the young adult who knows that even if he stumbles and falls when acting with his new freedom, he will never be rejected or scorned. He will always have a place in the home.) in a much more powerful and dependable way. **Because of God's love in Christ, we are free from anxiety and uncertainty. Our home, our destiny, is secure. No one can take it from us.** And **beyond that, we are free to live with gratitude and maturity, according to the principles that have been embedded in us by the careful working of God's Spirit.** We are free to act responsibly and. Joyfully. NOT out of some weary sense of duty, burdened by legal restraints, complaining about an overbearing parent, still trying get away with things, pushing the boundaries like an immature, rebellious child.

No, we are free to really live, to acknowledge that this pattern and style of life which the Spirit has been nurturing in us is really the key to wholeness, inner peace, joy and fulfillment.

This, you see, is the **ultimate reformation that must take place in our hearts and lives.** That by the wonder of God's love in Christ, which assures us of acceptance and unqualified love, we would be moved to live lives of grateful celebration and thanksgiving, revealing the love and caring and generosity that has been written in our hearts. Not rules, but privileges and responsibilities to be joyfully assumed and accepted. Not like a child, whining and trying to get away with doing the least possible, but like a mature, grateful adult who fully understands the privileges that have given by a loving Parent.

And make no mistake, this IS a reformation, a radical new way of thinking and living. We are so tempted to think in childish ways, to revert to simplistic rules.

The child in me says, *Do I have to go to church every Sunday?* This new Covenant suggests that you might contemplate the radical idea of wanting to go to church every Sunday.

The child in me says, *Do I have to get involved in the messy, time-consuming business of serving in the community of faith, caring for the less fortunate in the*

community? No, you don't have to do any of that. You are free. But the new Covenant encourages us to share time and talent as a privilege and opportunity, a reflection of what it means to walk with Christ.

The child in me says, *Do I have to give my hard-earned money to church and charity?* No, there are no rules. We are free. ..privileged to give with a joyful heart, responding to a generous Father who fills our lives with countless blessing.

This is the **good news on this Reformation Sunday.** We are set free by a loving, forgiving Father. Free to live like grown-ups, maturing in our faith, living by the principles that have been embedded in us, free to live the abundant life in Christ.

May the **God of grace enable us to receive this word, and rejoice to live by it.**
Amen.