

Here We Walk: Toward Writing a Grace Proclamation

Joshua 24:1,14-18, 25-6

On October 31, 1517, Martin Luther walked to All Saints Church in Wittenberg and nailed to its front doors his “95 Theses”. These theses were aimed at reforming the errors and abuses of the Church. Thus the Protestant Reformation began. Over the next few years church leaders demanded that he recant his words, but he refused.

Four years later, in 1521, excommunicated by the Pope, he was brought up on charges of heresy. Again, the Church council demanded he recant. He replied,

My conscience is captive to the Word of God. Thus I cannot and will not recant....Here I stand; I can do not other. Help me God.

I

This summer at Grace during our Season of Grace, we will be preparing to write a congregational proclamation, a declaration of who we are and what we are about. It is not a “Here I stand” statement of the pastor, but the work of the congregation. So the theme for the summer is “Here *We* Walk!” It is not a position paper written in stone (only God does *that!*), but a description of the path we are walking at Grace, as Grace, in 2022. It is not a timeless document,

but an expression of who we are and what we are about as a community of faith at this time of our life together. So it is “Here We *Walk!*” Not stand, not sit, walk!

II

Our text for today comes from the end of the book of Joshua. He has led the people of Israel across the Jordan into the Promised Land. Now he gathers them all together and asks that they make a covenant that will bind them to God and to one another. First, he recites all that God has done to bring them out of slavery in Egypt into the Promised Land. Now comes the charge:

Now therefore, revere the Lord and serve the Lord with undivided loyalty; put away the gods that your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates (where Abraham lived) and in Egypt... and the *baal* gods in Canaan.... Choose this day which ones you are going to serve.... But I and my household will serve the Lord.

In reply the people declared, Far be it from us to forsake the Lord our God (*Yahweh* our God) who brought us and our fathers from the land of Egypt.... We too will serve the Lord, for the Lord (*Yahweh*) is our God.

Then Joshua made a covenant for the people and wrote it in a book, a book of instructions from God. He took a great stone and set it up at the foot of an oak in

that ancient holy place of worship. They had a covenant, and a stone marked the place where they entered into it.

III

At Grace we place a covenant at the center of our life together. We have revised and renewed it through the years. Such a document can be a “stone of stumbling”, to use the biblical image, if it halts our journey in God, with God, toward God with Jesus. The old hymn goes, “On Christ the solid rock I stand”, but Christ is also The Way, a path we follow, as Christ leads us today. It is a milestone, not a millstone!

So this summer let’s work together to compose a Grace Proclamation. Each Sunday I will lead with a theme and a question, then turn the rest of the sermon time to you for congregational conversation.

We were formed in 1970. I read recently that the years of distance between 1970 and 1918 are the same as between 1970 and 2022. That startled me and set my mind into action.

How many changes in the nation and the world and church happened between 1918 and 1970? How many changes have happened between 1970 and 2022? How should we adapt and respond to all the changes of these years in order to be who God wants us to be today?

When Martin Luther nailed his “95 Theses”, the whole western world was undergoing a great sea change—in the life of nations, in politics, in economics, in education and in religion.

We stand at such a time today. The change has been afoot for awhile. The pandemic has accelerated the rate of change that is upon us. How will we respond at Grace Baptist, 719 Club Drive, Statesville, N.C., in all the particularity of who and where we are?

Theologian and writer Phyllis Tickle says, looking over Christian history, that every 500 years the Church has a great rummage sale. Some things that are no longer essential are tossed aside in order for God’s people to be who God is calling them to be. We are now at that 500 year mark after the Reformation.

One of the Reformation slogans was the “church reformed and always being reformed.” We are always in the process of becoming.

How are we being reformed by the Spirit today?

Jesus spoke of a scribe “trained” for the kingdom of God (Matthew 13:52). The scribe is like a householder, he said, who goes to the house treasury, or pantry, and takes out what is old and what is new.

That's the way of the kingdom of God, bringing together the treasures of the old and the new. What old and new things do we want to take out of the cupboard this summer?