

Jeremiah 31:31-34

John 8:31-36

Romans 3:19-28

“God our refuge; God our strength;
why fear, the Lord of hosts is here.” AMEN!

We are here.

We are here to commemorate the day
that Martin Luther went to the
Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany

to post his 95 Theses that documented
ways the Catholic Church had gone off the rails.

We have sung the great Martin Luther hymn and
have read the traditional texts
assigned for the day.

We will recognize that the action of
this humble monk and respectable teacher,
was one of bravery and self-sacrifice.

Those who have been a Lutheran or
part of the Protestant church traditions,
fully know (best we can) that what
Luther did was no empty performance.

He risked life and limb by making such
a public act of honesty.

He set himself in direct conflict with people and
the community that he loved, and that
can be painful;

Outcast, stripped of his position and titles,
and sent into hiding.

Historians, and Luther's own writings, reveal to us
that he desired not a schism (or split) in
the Catholic Church.

He was seeking to simply reform it.

But, a split occurred.

A split that has lasted 505 years,
if my math is correct.

Reformation Sunday is a festival day for us,
but we are also reminded that this is
not permission for us to celebrate
a superiority over anyone.

Today is not a day of "I told you so's" nor are
we to beat the drum and sing
"We are the champions!"

It sounds simple enough,

this kind of humility, but
if we are not careful we can read the text
from Jeremiah today and come away
with an idea that

the prophet Jeremiah's words from God
(about writing a new covenant)
meant that the old one with God's people
was invalid... it wasn't!

It's easy for us to point the finger and
"shame, shame, shame," the others,
in this case the Jewish people.

When the truth is God's word of writing
"a new covenant on the people's heart" is
a call to trust that, even in our worst,

Even in our most selfish and stubborn selves,
we can trust God to reestablish relationship
with humanity.

This is a consistent characteristic of God.

Christ's pursuit to reestablish relationship
with humanity. (Pause)

Humans, though, are not so good at doing this.

In these days of canceling others, or
permanently condemning people
for past mistakes,

we are quick to write people off
and cut relationships instead of reforming them.

Yet, if we trust that God is at work yesterday,
today, and tomorrow in
reestablishing (reforming) relationships...
then perhaps so can we. (Pause)

You see, reformation means
more than just referring to the church. (2X)

This day is not only one that celebrates the past
but recognizes that to be reformed doesn't
mean the old is thrown away, but that
God takes what exists and sculpts it
into something better.

God re-forms...

God is reforming people into God's image, and
with the Spirit of God, constantly at work,
we find there are ways that will make us one.
(Pause)

Last Sunday, we had the chance to witness

such a oneness at work during the picnic.

With the time of coming together for
food and fellowship, the reformation of God
was at work.

With the hands that set up and cleaned up,
provided food and welcome...

God was seen as making us better.

Reformation occurred in last week's
anthem of "Guide my Feet."

Reformation occurred in the times of laughter
and time of tears,
each noted how when we gather it is
with the sacred belief that God is at work

reforming and showing us how to view the world.

Not a view that says
"we got it right and you didn't" but
an understanding to view the world
through the resurrection. (Pause)

In my study, one of the commentators
I follow is Father Richard Rohr.

His words speak of deep wisdom to me.

This week, they directed me to a section in
the Wisdom of Solomon book in
the Old Testament.

In that section of the Bible called the Apocrypha.

We are told of a God who is
all-powerful **and** merciful.

It says in chapter 11:

“the whole world before you is like a speck
that tips the scales, and like a drop of morning
dew that falls on the ground.

But you are merciful to all, for you
can do all things, and you overlook
people’s sins so that
they may repent.

For you love all things that exist,
(breathe that in a second) and

detest none of the things that you have made,
for you would not have made anything
if you had hated it.

How would anything have endured if you
had not willed it?

Or how would anything not called forth by you
have been preserved?

You spare all things, for they are yours,
O Lord, you who love the living.” (Pause)

This is wisdom language from God.

There’s a purity, and a tranquility in God’s word
which draws us into relationship.

An inviting God that calls, offers forgiveness
and leads us to joy. (Pause)

We recently spoke in our Bible Talk last Sunday
about reasons why we invite people to church.

There are many reasons, but when people come
and go from congregations,

We invite people to have a chance to
find themselves and to find God revealing
God’s Self to them and us.

It is like opening the Bible to find there’s God,
there’s wisdom and there’s reformation.

And we invite others to share the experiences
they've had with God and speak of the ways
God invited them to make a home in
the world of God,
God's word and God's world. (Pause)

Listen, God is calling, reforming slaves (all of us!)
into family members.

Making previous strangers now
bound in familial relationship.

There are not many, maybe not any,
places where this happens...
but it must happen in the church.

It is something we see at St. Stephen...

A place where estrangement and exclusion
is not permitted.

A place where people are united in one,
not uniform in identity or even belief.

A place where God invites you to recognize
and embrace your own identity.

Listen, listen, listen... God is calling.

AMEN!