



A few weeks ago, I received an email from my college alma-mater of Wittenberg University in Springfield, Ohio. Usually, they're just throwing out creative ways of asking for money from us alumni, but this time, it included a link to a video recording. It was from the previous Sunday's worship, when they officially installed the new campus pastor. The Bishop of the Southern Ohio Synod of the ELCA presided over the service, and plenty of faculty and staff were there in their full get-up of robes and fancy hats. Such special occasions are meant to bring about hope and new life, but I will be the first to admit that I was initially uneasy and disappointed, because it was yet another reminder how much things have changed there since I graduated.

Even in that relatively short timeframe, the wonderful professors who made a tremendous impact on me are no longer there. The choir directors are gone. And the pastors, who are husband and wife, who helped me during the time of when I caved into going along with this whole pastor thing, have now retired. And so, I join the chorus of seemingly all humanity wondering if all the good 'ole days are now gone, because obviously what I experienced was the best of them all.

Some of those "good 'ole days" on campus for me was the first Friday evening in December. It was the night of their annual Lessons & Carols service, an event that the two pastors spent so much time in planning and working together with various music groups and finding Scripture readers from the college and surrounding community. It had a way of providing peace and calm amidst the hustle and bustle of the craziest season not just with the holidays, but of dreaded final exams and intimidating research papers galore. It was a night to remind us of the ultimate purpose of Christ coming among us: to beautifully unleash the love and grace to soothe us to our very core; the very Jesus Christ who would more than manage to live on through any transition of life, not just school graduations, but transitions in the church as well.

So, on this Reformation Sunday, I wonder just how many times the words of the "good 'ole days are gone" have been echoed well beyond our ability to count them in our over 500 years of history. Although we have come to believe that our beloved Martin Luther never intended to shake up the Roman Catholic Church of the time to the point of leading to a drastic reformation to the point of a new church body; nevertheless, he was adored for his standing up to a church that was obsessed in its own power. He was cherished and revered, perhaps, too much so for many of his peers. So, exactly how many new Lutherans, as they would soon be called, asked the question, "How can the church possibly survive without him?" when he died only 30 years after the Reformation was ignited? How many people wondered if the good 'ole days of hope and new life were going to gradually fade away?

I wonder how many times those same questions have been asked over our treasured history. How many times children of God seriously doubted that a certain congregation could survive if a beloved pastor took a call elsewhere, if a parish administrator retired, if a custodian took a job doing something else. How many times did a certain church wonder if it could possibly survive with such a pivotal member of their corner of the body of no longer being there? As if our ability to share the Good News of hope and new with one another and beyond was ultimately dependent on one or two people in our midst.

Except, on this Reformation Sunday, we do not celebrate Martin Luther. We do not worship the Lutheran church and our history. We do not proclaim certain pastors and other employees and volunteers as the centerpiece of our faith. Luther himself would be furious with us for that: for the Gospel is all about the One who came among us with the ultimate love and grace to soothe us to our core, and set us free to spread that hope and new life with all people inside and outside church building walls.

It so happens that my alma-mater will still do the Lessons & Carols this December. Evidently, the message of that season still applies regardless of whomever is the pastor. Evidently, Christ is still Risen regardless of who sits in whatever office in a church building. Evidently, the Good News of God's love and hope is just as real and true through all the ages. Evidently, our faith is not dependent on Martin Luther or our Lutheran church history. Granted, it has certainly helped shape us for the better, but on this Reformation Sunday, we are invited to reform our hearts and minds to not be obsessed with the "good 'ole days" of however many years ago, but to experience every day as a most precious opportunity to know and share God's love in Jesus Christ, our church's one and only foundation. For that Great News, we certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen!