

Nativity Lutheran Church  
Palm Beach Gardens, FL  
October 29, 2017

Reformation Sunday  
Text: Jeremiah 31:31-34  
Theme: RAGS TO RICHES

**“Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each man teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”** Jeremiah 31:31-34, RSV.

### In Nomine Jesu

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There’s a story I saw this week that takes us back to a couple-of-weeks-ago text and sermon. There’s this rich guy planning a wedding ... did it all up big ... premiere invitation list. “A’s” only. And ... well, I think you’ll remember ... what happened when none of them showed up.

Well, in this new story there was a beggar who lived near that king’s palace. One day he was checking out the palace bulletin board and he saw a proclamation posted outside the gate. The king was giving a great dinner. Anyone dressed in royal garments was invited to the party. Well, the beggar was on his way, but he looked at the rags he was wearing and scratched his head. **Surely only kings and their families wore royal robes**, he thought. And slowly an idea crept into his mind. And the audacity of it made him tremble. Would he dare?

He made his way back to the palace and approached the guard at the gate. **“Please, sir, I would like to speak with the king.”**

**“Wait here,”** the guard replied, and in a few minutes, he was back. **“His majesty will see you,”** he said, and led the beggar in.

**“You wish to see me?”** asked the king. **“Yes, your majesty. I want so much to attend the banquet, but I have no royal robes to wear. Please, sir, if I may be so bold, may I have one of your old garments so that I, too, may come to the banquet?”**

Now that beggar was shaking so hard that he couldn't see the faint smile that was on the king's face. **"You have been wise in coming to me,"** the king said. He called to his son, the young prince. **"Take this man to your room and array him in some of your clothes."**

The prince did as he was told and soon the beggar was standing before a mirror, clothed in garments that he had never dared hoped for. **"You are now eligible to attend the king's banquet tomorrow night,"** said the prince. **"But even more important, you will never need any other clothes. These garments will last forever."**

**"Wow! Thanks!"** he cried.

But as he started to leave, he looked back at his pile of dirty rags on the floor. He hesitated. What if the prince was wrong? What if he would need his old clothes again? So he quickly gathered them up. Well, the banquet was far greater than he had ever imagined, but for some reason he couldn't enjoy himself as he had hoped. He'd made a small bundle of his old rags and it kept falling off his lap. The food was passed quickly and the beggar missed some of the best dishes.

Time proved that the prince was right. The clothes lasted forever. Still the poor beggar grew fonder and fonder of his old rags. As time passed people seemed to forget the royal robes he was wearing. They only saw the little bundle of filthy rags he clung to wherever he went. They even spoke of him as the old man with the rags.

One day as he lay dying, the king visited him. The beggar saw the sad look on the king's face when he looked at the small bundle of rags by the bed. Suddenly the beggar remembered the prince's words and he realized that his bundle of rags had cost him a lifetime of true royalty, and all he could do was weep bitterly at his folly. And the king wept with him.

You see, the beggar kept hanging on to his dirty old rags and wouldn't fully embrace the really "righteous" clothes that the king gave him. He was given the gift of royalty but wouldn't fully accept it.

Well, we're thinking red today. It's this year's Reformation Sunday. Since it all started in 1517 there could have been 500 Reformation Sundays. And at each and every one of them we would have been reminded of the grace that God through Christ has fully given us. Each of us.

Still, like that beggar, we never quite get it. We never fully accept it. We want to hang on to our old ways of earning heaven for ourselves – or at least thinking we can. We can't give up our rags to fully embrace the riches that God through Christ has given us.

That beggar was given those new clothes as a gift and we are given salvation as a gift. Salvation through Christ is a free gift from the Father to all his sinful children.

Now, unless this is your first time in a Lutheran worship service, you've heard this before. Grace is God's free, unmerited love for sinful people. It's free and unearned, there is nothing you or I can do, say, feel, or think to deserve God love for each and every one of us. God gave freely from the cross of Christ for you and me.

Grace – it's the gift which makes saints out of sinners. Luther liked to say that all of us are at the same time saints and sinners. Saints because we have the promise of salvation and sinners because that promise is not fully realized in us yet.

One of my pastor friends tells a story about another pastor who said he was trying to get a non-Christian to at least examine the claims of Jesus. But that person would always bring up this argument: **"Well pastor, I'd come to your church, but there are just too many hypocrites that go there."**

The pastor looked that man right in the eye and said, **"Oh nuts ... don't let that keep you from coming. One more won't make or break us."**

Yup, the church is made up of saints who are sinners. But there's a quality about us that shows others that we're different. Somehow they can tell that we know Christ.

You see, like it or not, our sainthood is showing. Wherever and however we live in this world, we bring a measure of Christ into it. Unavoidably, sometimes ... faithfully, other times. Christ is there to give us the strength to live and in that living we show others who we are. We are saints and sinners at the same time.

And in that relationship with Christ, we find the power to live life among all the brokenness we encounter each day. It's Christ's love for us that enables us to carry on.

It's this love that speaks to a brother who goes to the grave of his sister, places a flower on the headstone, and stands there in silent grief shedding unashamed tears. It's this love from Christ that says it's all right to cry, to shed a tear, to feel sorrow, loneliness and the pain of death. And it's this love of Christ that continues to say to that grieving brother, **"I will redeem those tears, I will bring victory out of the sting of death. I will bring you the assurance of the promise there is a resurrection for all who believe."**

It's the love of Christ that sees a widow who sits in a chair that has finally molded itself to her. And she's watching the news, the local forecast and the the sports in which she has no interest. She rises from her chair and goes to the TV set. Time to call it a day. She pats the set twice on its top and says. **"Night, night."**

It's the love of Christ that says to this lonely widow, **"I have come to free you from this loneliness. I have come to help you break the bonds of this despair. I have come to free you so that you can live life to the fullest. I have come to surround you with the community of Christ in which you will have brothers and sisters who will always keep you company."**

It's the love of Christ that says to a single mom who has just lost her once thriving business and is wondering how she will support her family now that there's no income. To her Christ's love says, **"I am with you to give you the courage and the strength to try again."** It's the love of Christ that assures her that God will provide as he does for the birds of the air, and the lilies of the field.

It's the love of Christ that says to a couple who are struggling with their relationship that he can come and help each one to forgive the wrong that's occurred, and in that forgiveness, they can continue to love each other.

It's the love of Christ that says to those who are living with chronic illness, **"Even though you've prayed for healing, my grace is sufficient for you as I give you the courage to live."**

It's the love of Christ that says to all of us who are burdened with guilt ... guilt of wrongs which have been done, guilt of feeling that somehow you are responsible for the wrongs of others ... even parents, teachers, and pastors.

And it's the love of Christ that says to each person here today, **"I love you in spite of yourself. And because of that love you can have the courage, the strength and the conviction to change, to begin again in and through my love for you."**

It's the love of Christ saying to each of us here today, **"You've been changed, you are saved and in that salvation you can be 'little Christs' to those around you."** You are indeed saint and sinner and in that paradox you can live in the love of Christ and because of that love you can reach out a hand to those around you who are encountering the brokenness of life.

It's the love of Christ that says to each of us that you have been given a gift, a gift of salvation. It's not something that you've earned, it's given freely and it's given fully. And it's with that gift that you and I are challenged to be engaged in this world as both saint and sinner.

Remember how God said in Jeremiah in today's first reading: **"and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people."**

In the name of Jesus!

AMEN!

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Soli Deo Gloria