

Sermon for October 25th
Reformation Sunday

May the words from my lips and the meditations of our hearts always be pleasing to you O God.

Our scripture readings today remind us that God's relationship with God's people has always been about reforming and reshaping.

The scripture readings also have some verses we hold fast to.

From Jeremiah - "I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts."

From the Psalm - "Be still and know that I am God"

From our Gospel - "The truth will make you free"

And From Romans - "For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law."

It was this passage from Romans that Martin Luther used in his arguments against the practice of the selling of indulgences. Paul's words stand at the heart of the preaching of Martin Luther and other Reformation leaders.

Luther was not the only reformer of the 16th Century - there was Zwingli in Switzerland, the Anabaptists and the Jesuits and Carmelite orders in the Catholic Church. No human being makes themselves right with God through works.

Much of what is admired about Martin Luther is the image of a person who had great courage. A person willing to stand up for what they believe. This was an uncomfortable truth. An inconvenient truth especially to powerful people in his time.

Luthers' argument against the sale of indulgences - a way to get out of purgatory - that was really a way to raise funds, was not only theological.

Social justice was part of Luther's argument against the sale of indulgences. It was most often the poor who were the victims of these sales. The people least able to afford it. The people who were taught to fear what happened when they died. Taught to fear judgement. Taught that if they did not do enough "good works" they would go to hell. The people who were offered another way - buy an indulgence - save time in purgatory or hell for yourself or a loved one.

Martin Luther and the reformers wanted to change that. The central goal of the reformation was to bring us back to the sources, the scripture. Luther's emphasis on faith over works was a liberating word.

Reformation Sunday gives us a chance to go back to the sources - the scripture that shows us God's steadfast and unchanging love. A chance to remind ourselves that we do not have to do anything to earn God's love. We already have it.

We are God's precious children. God holds us through the good things and times and the failures and trials and the bad things and times.

And perhaps this Reformation Sunday we need to hear this especially.

Our world is ever- changing. But this year it really changed. Covid has changed many things for us. But today perhaps we can ask where might God's grace reform us again?

Our scriptures today call us back to the simple trust that is faith.

There is much to celebrate today - much to rejoice in. God's love - God's grace - God's call does not depend on what we do - does not depend on us trying to worship or

pray or sing a “right way”. It does not depend on righteous achievement or special knowledge.

It is only about accepting God’s gift.

It is about faith and trust and believing that we are known and loved and forgiven. Each of us. When we know that we are beloved children - people of God. When we are secure in our place in the Kingdom then we can live in and with peace.

Today we celebrate our faithful and adaptive God who remains our “refuge and our strength” in an ever-changing world.

On Reformation Sunday we celebrate the past but we also acknowledge that the Church must continue the process of reforming. On Reformation Sunday we celebrate the power of God’s grace to re-form and reshape.

Karl Barth said “The Church must always be reformed”.

Where will the grace of God lead us? What will God call us to do? What re-forming and re-shaping await us?

Wherever this leads us - whatever this looks like we know we are not alone.

AMEN