

Sermon for Reformation Sunday – October 26, 2014  
John 8:31-36  
Pastor Alan Bray, First Lutheran Church, St. Peter, MN

Grace and peace to each of you in the name of Jesus, our crucified and risen Lord. Amen

Today, Lutherans everywhere celebrate Reformation Sunday. And oftentimes, we do so with gusto...proudly singing our official Lutheran Fight Song “A Mighty Fortress is Our God” at the top of our voices...much like the Badgers sing “On Wisconsin.”

On this day, we also enjoy telling stories about our patron saint, Martin Luther. Most of us remember him fondly as a larger-than-life preacher whose great girth was no doubt due to a few too many beers and a fondness for tater-tot hot dish.

While we love to get into the mood of Reformation Sunday, we don't always remember very clearly why it is that we celebrate this festival.

Many of us remember Martin Luther having said, “Here I stand!”...but we don't really remember where he stood or what that meant by that.

We're all proud of Luther, of course, primarily because he invented the Christmas tree.

And, on this day, we're especially thankful that Luther translated the Bible from Latin into Lutheran...particularly because we learned in his new translation that Jesus himself was a Lutheran.

You'll recall, for example, the story of the Feeding of the 5,000. As Luther translates it, when faced with the daunting prospect of feeding over 5,000 people with almost no food, Jesus took five pieces of lutefisk from a small boy, lifted the lutefisk toward heaven, and said, “Uff dah!”

Then he passed the fish to the crowds...and for some reason everybody immediately claimed to be full. Jesus looked at the baskets of left over lutefisk, again said, “Uff dah!” and then muttered something about lutefisk being “the piece of cod which passes all understanding.” The crowds had already dispersed.

Well, those are just a few of the reasons we celebrate Reformation Sunday as we do!

But if we can shift gears just a little bit, here's something that Jesus really said...at least according to St. John in this morning's gospel reading: “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” (John 8:31-32)

And what is the truth, we might well ask?

The truth is that we are all sinners saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Pure and simple...we are sinners saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

Once a year, on Reformation Sunday, we Lutherans (among others) stop for a moment to remember the significance of this truth. We celebrate this festival by paying our respects to Martin Luther who came to a new personal understanding of this Gospel truth in the early 1500's.

“We are saved!” Luther declared. “And how is this possible,” he asked. Many of you will recall his answer:

“I believe that Jesus Christ – true God, son of the Father from eternity and true man, born of the Virgin Mary is my Lord. At great cost He has saved and redeemed me, a lost and condemned person. He has freed me from sin, death, and the power of the devil not with silver and gold, but with his holy and precious blood and his innocent suffering and death. All this he has done that I may be his own, live under him in his kingdom and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as he is risen from the dead and lives and rules eternally. This is most certainly true!”

For nearly 500 years, Lutheran Christians have taken special pains to make certain this message is heard. For nearly 500 years, Lutheran Christians have consistently reminded all of Christendom that the essential truth of the Gospel is that we are saved by a gracious God through faith in Jesus.

This past Wednesday evening, this gospel truth” was the primary focus for discussion in our 9<sup>th</sup> grade confirmation class. And so we wrestled with the questions: What does it mean to be a Lutheran Christian? What is unique about our understanding of the Gospel message? What distinctive framework do we Lutherans offer in conversation with our non-Lutheran brothers and sisters? I’m not sure we made too much headway in our investigation, but at least we recognized that there are some differences in the way we see things.

Now, perhaps there are some of you who are saying: “Why didn’t you remind them of the more colorful parts of our Lutheran heritage?” And you’re right...I could have told them things like:

- You know you’re Lutheran when you think the four major food groups are: coffee, lefse, lutefisk and jello.
- You know you’re Lutheran when you only serve jello in the proper liturgical color for the season.
- You know you’re Lutheran when you end most conversations by saying: “This is most certainly true!”
- You know you’re Lutheran when someone mentions red and green, and you immediately think of the recent battle over a new church hymnal.
- You know you’re Lutheran when someone mentions the Holy City and you think of Chicago...or when someone refers to the Holy Land and you immediately think of Sweden or Norway.
- You know you’re Lutheran when you’re troubled by someone saying “casserole” instead of “hot dish.”

I could have shared that kind of information regarding Lutheran identity...and some of that would have been the truth...but it wouldn’t have been “THE TRUTH” that Jesus was speaking of in John’s gospel.

To be a Lutheran Christian is to have an affection for the mysterious depth, beauty and wisdom of such concepts as “grace alone”...”faith alone”... “scripture alone”...”Christ alone.”

To be a Lutheran Christian is to see life as an opportunity for joyful service in grateful response for all of God’s gifts freely given.

To be Lutheran is to know that we’re no better than anybody else. We honor what Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans: “There’s no reason to boast. We’re all saved by God’s grace...not because of anything so special about us...but rather because of God’s great love...because of God’s passionate desire to give of God’s self.”

To be a Lutheran Christian is to see all people of faith in Jesus Christ as brothers and sisters...all part of the Church catholic.

To be a Lutheran Christian is NOT to divide the Church, but rather to renew the Church...to reconcile the Church...to re-invigorate the Church...to reform the Church.

Therefore, today, on Reformation Sunday, let us remember and celebrate God’s gracious, abundant and compassionate love for all of creation. Let us pray:

*Gracious God,*

*We gather this Reformation Sunday morning to express our thanks for your gift of life and salvation. We gather as people of the Church...members of the one, holy, apostolic, catholic church...to acknowledge our common dependence upon you.*

*We ask you to minister to the needs of the Church. Where it is divided, bring your unifying presence. Where it is wounded, bring your healing touch. Where it is strident and arrogant, bring you sense of humility. Where it is lazy and apathetic, bring your Spirit’s energy and enthusiasm. Where it is restrictive and exclusive, bring your willingness to be open and welcoming.*

*As a congregation, we pray for your involvement in our mission to make disciples of Christ. Let the truth of your Gospel message make us free to serve others with joy and gratitude. Fill us with the Spirit of your son, Jesus, our Lord and Savior. Amen*