

Jeremiah 31:31-34; Psalm 46; Romans 3:19-28

Grace to you and peace from God who was, who is, and who is to come. Amen.

It is Reformation weekend. Kind of a strange word, isn't it: "Reformation." Within our Lutheran heritage we kind of have it drilled into us and hopefully we learn about what Reformation and what the Reformation movement was when we went through confirmation. You might have even learned a little bit about it as you go through social studies class in junior high. But Reformation - what we call the Reformation movement - started with this guy, Martin Luther.

In the announcements this evening I mentioned a BBC article about an archeological find, that being that apparently Martin Luther's toilet was unearthed. Luther suffered from a bad diet and he had, how can I say . . . " bowel problems," which caused him to often times have to sit in a certain room to try to clean out his system. And it was while sitting on the "potty" that Luther did so much of his thinking. That's how he came up with these ninety-five thesis' that he then went and posted on the doors of the church in Wittenberg. In my copy of them here, they take up ten pages worth.

But these ninety-five thesis, or "things," are about stuff that was troubling to him within the church of the day. Now we have to remember back in the fourteen hundreds, fifteen hundreds there was only one church. When we talk about "the church," we meant the Christian church. For Luther one of the things that bothered him was that worship was held in Latin. Now centuries before Latin had been the common language and so of course when people got together they worshiped in the language of the day, that is, Latin. But as the church became legal and as it became, well, more *bureaucratic*, the worship remained in Latin even though Latin was no longer the primary language of the people who gathered for worship. And so, for example were I to stand up here and say, *Kenne sie Deutsch? Ich keene, nicht grosse, abber ein bischen, abber Sie? Verstehen Sie mir?* Perhaps some of you could figure out what I was saying. It was that similar thought that Luther have, what good was it to have a worship service in a language that people don't understand.

Another problem that Luther thought was facing the church of his day was that they had these things called *relics*. Some of these were bits of bone; they might be pieces of wood; there might even be a skull or a nail or perhaps even a small vial of blood. And they were supposedly from various saints - People of faith who had died over the centuries. Relics encompassed all kinds of objects from all kinds of saints. There were even bits and pieces supposedly of the cross of Jesus.; Of the spear that pierced Jesus' side; a vial of blood that supposedly came from Jesus. And these relics supposedly had well more than just special meaning: had special powers. If one were to go and pray in the present of a relic they might be cured of some disease, or God was more likely to listen to them if they were there in the presence of that relic. The thing, though,

that really annoyed Luther about relics was that you had to *pay* to go be in the presence of that relic. And of course, the church kept that money.

A way the church raised money in a very big way was the sales of these things called *indulgences*. Most of us can probably know what it means to indulge ourselves in something. We might indulge in chocolate, we might every now and then indulge in a really rich meal or one of those brand new television set or something that is a bit extravagant. But the sale of indulgences were a way that the church said, “You are going to sin. You are going to sin and offend God but in order for this sin to **not count** as sin is that you can buy this thing called an indulgence.” they varied in price. What would say, how much would you be willing to pay, to miss a day of work and not get in trouble for it? Would twenty-five dollars be worth it for that sin not to count? Ok, that might be a good deal if it is a small sin, twenty-five dollars might not be too bad. Maybe that might be a sin of calling in sick on a day that you really weren’t sick. Well maybe you could pay a little bit more and get a bigger indulgence so that maybe you could go out drinking with your buddies while you tell your spouse that you have to work late tonight. Or even worse go out with somebody who is not your spouse. Even to the point where you could buy an indulgence that would allow you to kill someone. And you would be *forgiven*. Now you could buy these indulgences for past offenses or you could buy these indulgences for future offenses.

And this, Luther said, this is not right, this is not good. And so Martin Luther came up with all these different ideas (called “theses”) and he wrote them down and he took them to the main church door in Wittenberg and he nailed them to the door. Now that might seem a little strange to us, but we have to remember in the 1500's that the center of the town was usually the church, the center of the social life centered around the church and we didn’t have television and we didn’t have radio. So they would have plays, they would have public speaking, they would have debates. There was a debate coming to town so Luther took these theses and posted them on the door as a way to say to the people “these are some of the things I think we ought to talk about. These are some things that we ought to debate.” Well, they debated them, but not in a manner that Luther wanted them to. Because as the people of the church read them, and by people of the church, I should say by the church officials, not the congregation, but the church officials – the hierarchies within the churches – they read these theses and realized that they were going to cause radical change within the church if they were to be adopted. We’re Lutheran, we know change needs to come about slowly. And the church officials of the day felt the same. They saw these changes and they thought “we can’t do this” and that is kind of the basis of difficulties that Luther had within the church of his day.

Now Luther was not the only one who was trying to change who is trying to reform the church. There were other people through out Europe who were also trying to do the same thing. Luther just happens to be the most well know. Because he was the one who was the most vocal, he was the one who was the most verbose. But Luther never wanted the church to split, he wanted it to

change, he wanted to bring the church back to what he understood to be the core of Christianity. And he certainly didn't want his followers to be called Lutherans. He pulled his hair out over that one as they starting to be called Lutherans. Luther wanted to fix what wasn't right. He wanted worship to be in the language of the people. He wanted scripture available to everyone. At that point in time scripture was only available in the church, Bibles were literally chained to the lectern. And the Bibles were written in Latin and most people couldn't read them anyway and so that was one of the first things that Luther did was to start to translate scripture in the language of the people. Luther wanted people to be worshiping God, not relics, not things. But most importantly Luther came to understand as you heard read to us in the Romans tonight and emphasized from Jeremiah's reading that we are saved, not by our works, but by the grace of God.

It is not by anything that we do. It is not the exterior, but it is from within. We are saved by grace through faith. Nothing that we can **do** saves us. We can serve God, we can follow the law, the law that Moses received on Sinai and that was extended throughout the book of Leviticus and even more so over the centuries by the various religious leaders. We can follow that law and dot all the "i's" and cross all the "T's." We can follow that law to the letter. But following the law does not save us. Following the law does not earn us God's love, it does not bring us God's grace. It is that salvation, that gift of faith that God gives to us, that as Jeremiah says is now written on our hearts. It is not following the law with our fingers and our bodies, but in our spirits, saying "I really don't want to be doing this, but I am going to do it anyway because the law says I have to." No, the law, the love, the grace of God is now within us and it is from that grace written on our hearts, it is from that love of God now written on our hearts that we are called to live our lives as believers. To be a witness of our faith in all that we do. We can still follow the law, the law of Moses, the law that is written in Leviticus. But following the law doesn't save us. If we follow the law, we do it because we are believers.

I think though that we are still in the midst of a reformation. It didn't happen back in the 1500's. It didn't stop in 1517 after Luther posted the theses. It didn't stop after 1560 something when the Council of Worms convened. It didn't stop just because we now have Lutherans and Presbyterians and Roman Catholics and Episcopalians and all of the different branches of Christianity. We continue to reform the church. We continue to reform the body of Christ. But the things, the reforming that needs to be done now, are not the same as the reforming in Luther's days. As a matter of fact many of the things that Luther said were wrong with the church the Roman Catholic Church not that long ago came out and said "you know what, we agree with Martin Luther. He was right. There were some things that were radically wrong with the church of that day." But Reformation in the 21st century, it might not be what you think. Reformation is not blessing same sex unions. Reformation is not ordaining those people in long term committed relationships. Reformation today is deciding if we are going to be complacent to not speak out against injustice. Reformation that is facing the church today is deciding are we going to be quiet and inactive about the thousands of Americans that go to bed hungry every night. Reformation today is deciding if are we going to be quiet and not cry out for fair wages, or health care for all, for equitable taxation. The Reformation that faces our

church today is about caring for others. And that is the same as what faced Luther. Luther cared for those people in his church. He wanted them to hear worship in their own language. He wanted them to have scriptures in their homes. He wanted them not to be off worshiping things and so in that sense the Reformation does remain the same. That we care for the welfare, the well being of others. But as Paul reminded us, as Jeremiah put it so eloquently centuries ago, the law of God is now in our hearts. The Reformation of the church continues, but it comes from within. So on this Reformation weekend as we go forth in to the world, let us do so seeking to reform the world with God's love, in God's grace. Sharing that with everyone around us.

Amen.