

*“The Truth Will Make You Odd”*

Reformation Sunday  
The Reverend Nancy R. Easton

October 30, 2005  
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church

Jeremiah 31:31-34; Romans 3:19-28; John 8:31-36

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

My husband Randy and I have never been athletes. We are much better on the sidelines, cheering the team. However, we have given our three children opportunity to try various sports, to see if they are so inclined and interested, and if they possess an innate athletic ability that for some reason skipped at least two generations. Our youngest plays soccer with other 3<sup>rd</sup> graders on what’s called a “recreational” team, which means it’s not quite as competitive, the skill level not quite as intense. That’s just fine with us and with Rebecca. Don’t think she’ll play soccer next year—it’s not her thing. That’s OK with us, too.

Rebecca has not scored a goal in three years, nor could we say she’s gotten an assist. Maybe the most we could say she has assisted with an assist, meaning she kicked it to someone who kicked it to someone who eventually got a goal. But let me tell you what I like about Rebecca’s years in soccer. At least twice I’ve noticed that when it appeared as if someone was hurt—they got kicked by accident, or the ball came hard at ‘em—Rebecca has gone over to them to see if they were OK. Granted, the ball was still in play, the ref hadn’t blown the whistle yet, Rebecca should have headed toward the ball, or at least stayed in her position. Instead, she went over to the other girl out of concern. I’m glad she did what, competitively-speaking, she **wasn’t supposed to do**.

On this Reformation Sunday, as we consider what it is to be the Church, the Body of Christ in our broken world; as we ask God to reform us, shape us into his people anew each day; let me suggest that what God calls the Body of Christ to do is exactly what the world says **it isn’t supposed to do**.

The Southern writer, Flannery O’Connor, is reported to made an interesting paraphrase of Jesus’ words in John’s Gospel. John records Jesus saying, *“You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”* O’Connor, in her inimitable style, said, *“You will know the truth, and the truth will make you **odd**.”*

Why do you suppose Flannery O’Connor said that?

Because living a Christ-centered life is invariably **at odds** with so much of what the world dishes out, expects, teaches and values.

Take a look at our world:

We have oil and gas companies making hefty profits in the wake of hurricanes, and a legislature voting itself a hefty pay raise in the dead of night, while all around us are people who will shiver in the dead of winter when they can’t pay their heating bills.

We respond with adulation to Hollywood celebrities as if they speak with real authority—their fame is all that commands authority—and so we listen to Tom Cruise bash psychiatry and antidepressants even though both have been lifesavers for those struggling with mental illness.

We wonder why it is Johnny can't read but he sure knows how to rant and rave and rage (the 3 "R's). Well, Johnny struggles with anger management because his parents can't keep their mouths shut at those soccer games! They're ranting and raving and raging at the kids, the coach, the ref.

We are encouraged to consume at a super-sized level, be it food, televisions, cars, fashions, energy—and we've come to believe it is our due, our right to possess it all and use it all up. This is the world we live in and get caught up in.

And what's the Church **supposed to do** in all this? Keep its nose out of where it doesn't belong? Entertain the masses? Function as just another social club for a certain clientele of members? That is what some congregations and pastors do. That is a comfortable place for the Church to be. Just comply with the world's ways in order to be more appealing, in order to "fit in" with our culture, in order to keep the crowds comin' and the coffers filled. Right?

No. The Church is called by God to speak the truth, and, in fact, live it. Now, O'Connor said you will know the truth, and the truth will make you odd. Or we can say it Jesus' way—you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free. Let's think about that truth and that freedom. The truth Jesus is talking about is the reality of his own self, come into our world. He is the visible truth of a holy, just and loving God to whom we and all creation belong. What was our first song—*I belong to a Mighty God*? I know, FaithX, that sometimes we joke about how that song sounds so country-twangy, something Conway Twitty might have sung. But I think the words are great—*"I belong to a mighty God. I belong to Jesus. I'm guided by His staff and rod, I belong to a mighty God. I am justified by the good gift of the Lord; and I will testify that I belong to a mighty God."*

This reality of Jesus coming among us is the way we know that God has and continues to give us life. It's a life we simply can't find on our own. That's what Jesus was saying to those who insisted that their being descendants of Abraham was their ticket to freedom and abundant life with God. We can't achieve that freedom or abundant life by our own efforts, no matter how much money we spend, no matter how much frenetic activity we cram into every 24 hours, no matter what popular circle of people we manage to access, no matter what we do to convince ourselves we're better than someone else. Instead, those kinds of crazy things we do to make life OK for ourselves, and the brokenness we experience in our world, indicate our **lack** of freedom, our enslavement.

But Jesus is the truth of this holy, just and loving God who says to us, "I've **got** the whole world in **my** hands." He proclaims this to us in spite of what we continually think and do. This creation is **God's** work, and, as we learned this morning from the prophet Jeremiah, God is determined to create a reality with his people where they finally will know the truth of him, not just intellectually, but know him in their hearts

with an intimacy born of mutual love. Even though we can't keep from breaking the 10 commandments, Jeremiah prophesies, well, by golly, God will **still** find a way to build a relationship with us that endures. **And God does find a way.** God's way is to offer forgiveness to us—even though we have acted as if He doesn't matter. Ultimately, his way of offering forgiveness will be offering himself in Jesus. God's way is to keep on reestablishing the relationship. That isn't what God is **supposed to do!** Is that odd, or what?

So just what will happen if we live in this new way God intends? What will happen if we understand ourselves as truly free from the constant nagging pressure of trying to gain whatever it is we think at last will satisfy? What will happen if we stop doing what the world says we're **supposed to do** in order to be popular or successful or happy? What will happen if we trust God's promise that his Holy Spirit **is** at work in us, giving us the faith, courage and love we need to live in ways the world presently thinks quite odd? Just what will happen if we finally recognize that all of us—all of our brothers and sisters around the world—belong to a mighty God who says he justifies us, forgives our iniquity and remembers our sin no more?

I'll tell you what will happen—it will be a reformation the likes of which the Church and the world have never seen. And **this** is the reformation we'll see:

Men and women, like Rosa Parks, who dare to challenge injustice and be a voice for people who have no voice.

An outpouring of giving with no thought about profit motives and “what's in it for me?”

A Church which welcomes the outcast, loves the unlovable, and embraces those the world disdains.

The members of this congregation let loose, set free to be Christ not only in this parish, but also in the places we work and play—and we'll rejoice knowing this community is where you and I, each week, can gather together again to be fed for the journey.

The whole Body of Christ, teaching peace and showing compassion, worshiping God and declaring his mighty deeds and his kingdom.

It will be a true reformation, for at last you and I will be more concerned about the well-being of our brother or sister than scoring a goal. And, you know, **it won't seem the least bit odd. AMEN.**