

Pastor Jon's Reformation Sunday Sermon on October 25th, 2020

Today we celebrate Reformation Sunday in the church. I have preached many Reformation sermons over the years. And the main message is: you are saved by grace, through faith, on account of Christ alone... not by works of the law. Our righteousness or our being in a right relationship with God comes to us as a gift through Jesus work on the cross and in his resurrection.

But the more I thought about, "What would a 2020 reformation sermon look like?" You know what I mean.

What was going on in the world that sparked the reformation for Luther and other reformers before him? What was going on in Luther's time that gave him a sense of urgency to call out the theological abuses of the Roman Catholic Church, in which he was a priest and professor? Although we have worked out those differences now and agree that we are saved by grace.

Luther saw on the ground that conditions were being placed on the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And as Luther discovered in his intense study of scripture, the Gospel is a free gift for all. So the first thing that sparked the reformation was a study of scripture. If you want to reform your life or your church, begin with scripture.

Second, Martin Luther was born and lived in hard times. He was born in 1483 in Eiselben, Germany. Luther's father, who came from a peasant family, was a copper miner who then owned his own foundries. Luther's childhood was not a happy one, parents were harsh on him. He was whipped in school for not knowing his lessons. He suffered from depression and anxiety at different times throughout his life. He longed to find a gracious God who loved him as is.

Even though it was the Renaissance, life in the late 15th and early 16th century Europe was tenuous at best. There was a high infant mortality rate. For example, in Florence, Italy, 6 out of 10 infants would die before the age of six months. These were also years when the plague ravaged Europe. English philosopher Thomas Hobbes wrote that life was "Nasty, Bruttish, and Short" at the turn

of the 16th Century. Those tough enough to overcome the ravages of disease and the plague commonly struggled to find enough to eat. The sheer number of beggars and homeless in Luther's time was overwhelming to local authorities and churches.

In the midst of these hard times, Pope Leo the X, authorized the sale of indulgences to help pay for St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. Pope Leo and the church were in debt and needed to raise cash in a hurry. He sent Johann Tetzel, a traveling stump-preacher, to sell indulgences in Germany. These indulgences were like a get out of jail free card in monopoly for sinners, except they weren't free. They were primarily sold to help free those who have died and were in purgatory. A purchase of an indulgence certificate would free them from all sin. Tetzel would come to town with several horseman, drummers, and trumpeters. They would be carrying symbols of the papacy and a cross with an indulgence attached to it. Tetzel would find a platform and preach. At the end of his sermon he would say, "Once the coin into the coffer clings, a soul from purgatory heavenward springs!" He would pack up the money and go to the next town.

Luther, a young professor at Wittenberg University (34), saw this spectacle and penned his 95 Theses that he posted on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg. He was challenging the validity and effectiveness of papal indulgences. He wanted to create an open debate. With the advent of the moveable type printing press, Luther's 95 theses were copied in German and created an explosion in Germany and beyond. Luther, who was concerned for the souls of his own parishioners, couldn't remain silent, after he saw widow's houses being devoured by the church. He feared people would buy their indulgences and forget about caring for the vulnerable in society. After intensely studying scripture, in particular, Romans, Luther discovered that God's grace is a free gift that we can't earn or buy.

In our second lesson for today, we are reminded by Paul that we are not made right with God by works of the law... by our good works. The law, like the 10 commandments, is useful to convict us of our

sin and drive us to the foot of the cross. But grace is the new sheriff in town. It is the law of grace through faith in Jesus Christ that sets us free from our bondage to sin. In this new era of grace, God loves us and accepts us as is. By simply believing in Jesus Christ, we are saved. Paul says in Romans 3:23, “all sin and fall short of the Glory of God.” None of us will ever get it just right. But God demonstrated God’s love for us by sending Jesus into the world. This grace is a gift.

Therefore, our calling as Christians is to take the gift and share it with the world. This freedom we receive in Christ calls us to love our neighbors as ourselves. We are called to live lives of gratitude.

I find that I need this grace every day. I somehow mess something up every day. I love that fact that Paul says all have sinned and fall short of the Glory of God. That is good news for me. I need to hear daily that God’s grace is sufficient for me. How about you? Do you believe that God’s grace is sufficient for you? I hope so, because it is.