

Pastor Jon's Sermon from October 31, 2021

Reformation and Confirmation Sunday

Text: Jeremiah 31:31-34, Romans 3:19-28, and John 8:31-36

First of all, congratulations to our confirmands on affirming your baptism today.

For Martin Luther, the reformation of the church started with reading scripture. Luther discovered a gracious God in the New Testament, especially in Romans, that set him free from his fears and anxieties of being good enough for God or having to do something to earn God's love and grace.

So based on our lessons for today, I have three questions for us to ponder today.

What does it mean to place your hope in a God who forgets? How can you find rest from the busyness and pressures of life in the Good News of Jesus Christ? What is the truth that will set you free?

In our first lesson from Jeremiah 31, our hope is placed in a God who forgets. We meet a God who promises to remember our sin no more. What kind of God is this who makes covenant after covenant with God's people even when they don't live up to their end of the bargain? Covenants are usually grounded in relationship and built on trust. But here, God promises to make a new covenant with humans solely based on God's grace and God's forgetfulness.

How good are you at forgetting when someone breaks your trust or hurts you by their words or actions? We seem to be good at forgetting where we park and forgetting things like birthdays and anniversaries. But why are we like elephants in remembering when someone hurts us? We hold grudges and don't want to forgive. But not for God. Here God makes a shift. It is no longer about us being self-righteous by God's laws and statutes. This new covenant is about God's righteousness toward us. This new covenant is unconditional.

This is also confirmation weekend. Our five confirmands were asked to pick a Bible verse and write faith statements. Some of the things they wrote are profound and lift up the reformation message. It gives a window into their lives and faith. Without sharing names, I will share a few things from what they wrote.

“So now the time has come for me to confirm my baptism; to say yes to my decision in faith, and surprisingly for once, I am not anxious. I’m not anxious because I know that the decision I am making is what I want and is right for me. I understand what it means to be a Christian, and I want to publicly display that.

In all honesty, I am a very insecure person. I worry that I don’t look good enough, or that I am not good enough at the things I do, or that I’m not enough for friends and family, including God. Yet, over this 3 year confirmation period, I learned that I am enough for God, and I will always be enough for God. I have learned to accept myself for who I am, knowing that I may not always love myself as much as I would like, but there are others to fill that hole of love for me. God is helping me to work towards improving myself and my outlook on life each day, which is another reason I want to keep him and this way of faith in my life.” - *Izzy Ricketts*

“The person I look up to is Vicar Kellie. She has taught me that Christianity isn’t just cut and dry. It challenges and changes us, and it can be uncomfortable and difficult to understand. And that’s exactly what makes faith so special. It truly isn’t just studying the stories of a young lord, out to do good on earth, it’s facing challenges, accepting loss, learning new things, and experiencing emotions.”
-*Claudia Bjornstad*

“To me, being a Christian means that I am simply human. Being a Christian doesn’t mean being perfect. It doesn’t mean searching through the Bible for every law you can find and following them to the letter, or being better than others. It simply means that you are a person with flaws, doing your best. It means being an imperfect person in an imperfect world, but also one who strives to be their best self. It means that I was created by the most powerful, loving, and amazing being in existence, who loves me despite my flaws and insignificance.” -*Norah Spanbauer*

“A person I look up to in faith is Martin Luther. I chose him because he saw how the Catholic Church had gotten the Bible wrong and he tried to fix it and restore how he thought God’s word should be interpreted. Even though he could have been killed he still decided to do what was right and stand up for his faith. I think

we could learn to be strong in our faith and to stand up for what God's word says, and even in the face of adversity place our trust in God." -*Mason Grycowski*

"So that's it. I'm graduating you could say, but some graduates leave and adventure off, but for now, I believe that I'm going to stay with my beliefs of God and his love for me." -*Tanner Van Zummeren*

Not only is today about our confirmands saying Yes to their baptism, It is about God's yes to us in Jesus Christ. God already loves you as you are. You can't do anything more or less to increase God's love for you.

For some reason, though, we measure ourselves by how much we produce or consume. We measure ourselves by our looks or how well we do in school. We measure ourselves by the size of our homes or bank accounts. How many of you are tired and exhausted by trying to keep up with this theology of more. It is an unsustainable path that only leads to disappointment

But the Gospel... the good news of Jesus sets us free from all this striving and feeling we have to do more. The truth that sets us free is Jesus. God's yes to us in Jesus means we are already enough.

Finally gospel gives us the ability to say yes or no to things. Saying no is a sign of freedom as well. We often feel pressure to say yes, or do more. We don't want to disappoint anyone... or not look Christian. Well saying no also means you are freed by the Gospel.

If you know the truth, the truth will set you free.

Amen