
REFORMATION SUNDAY SERMON

Church of St. Stephen & St. Bede

Winnipeg, Manitoba

Sunday, October 25, 2015

PREACHER:

Pastor Ted Chell

TOPIC:

Celebration of faith heritage as Lutherans and Anglicans

TEXTS:

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

"You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32)

We celebrate our faith heritage as Lutherans and Anglicans for whom the Reformation of the 16th Century was a clarion call to renewed trust in God's Good News of Jesus' self-giving for our sins and the sins of the world.

Reformanda, semper reformanda was a renewing theme in the recent years of the Councils called together in the Roman Catholic Church... "*the reforming church **always** reforming*"....

In our heritage as inheritors of a rich tradition of including, in our journey through the Christian year, a focus on Reformation, we do well to recall the signal events of the 16th century and the emergence of an Augustinian monk by the name of Martin Luther which triggered the whole movement of history affecting the life and witness of the organized Christian Church on earth. Since the posting of the 95 thesis on October 30, 1517... (articles for discussion penned by this teaching monk), the teaching authority of the Monastic orders was challenged as to who had authority to interpret the scriptures for faith and life.... "the priesthood of all believers" became the new found mandate of every baptized believer to read and understand the message of God's Word in the scriptures.

This new found basis for authority of Scriptures was happening amid the revolutionary impact of the invention of the printing press with movable type.

The printed page no longer needed to be done only by hand (as had become the work of medieval monks working endlessly to produce elaborate versions of texts, if not the whole Bible, now could be reproduced in quantities of printed pages.....so that the Scriptures could be circulated well beyond the walls of monastic communities and beyond the ordered 'elite or ruling class' of the day.....now, for the first time in history

5,000 copies of printed texts could be reproduced and circulated through churches to people of all levels of education or authority.

With these historic scenes as background we hear, read, study and seek to understand the message of God's Word for our own commitment to a life lived in service, in ministry, in witness as children of God. We are given new life, the forgiveness of sins and the empowerment of the workings of the Holy Spirit to bear witness to the "truth that will make you free". We stand before God as those utterly dependent upon God's loving acceptance in spite of our shortcomings, or sins....the truth is that God reaches out to us not to condemn the world (or us) but to redeem and make us (as God's children) and the whole world new(entrusted to us humans to live in and use responsibly).

Today we celebrate the gifts of God that have come through our traditions as children of the Reformation. When I was a newly ordained pastor serving in a mission development in South Edmonton I remember knocking on doors to meet new people and repeatedly there were comments " Oh, you are Luther-RAN" (with emphasis on 'rans').

The church in the 16th Century had become so structured as to who had authority to read, let alone teach, the message of the Bible, so that only the clergy and members of monastic orders could be entrusted to read, let alone interpret the scriptures (all reproduced in medieval Latin by scribes in the monastery schools) Luther's reforming spirit was to challenge this fundamental authority of the Church in Rome. The Bible Luther came to know and believe in was, and is, a Living Word inspired by the Holy Spirit to proclaim Good News. So, when Luther read these words from John 8 "you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" his troubled conscience led him to discover anew the authority of the Bible was above popes and councils and was entrusted by the Holy Spirit to the believer as part of his/her baptism in Christ. Word and Sacraments were the centering points for God's saving work in Christ.

Our life together is blessed as we celebrate God's gifts in the Scriptures and in the life of worship under the guidance and calling of the Holy Spirit. Luther wrote two catechisms to help persons and families to know " the truth that will make us free" The small catechism contains the basic teachings of the Ten Commandments, The Creeds, The Lord's Prayer, The Sacraments of Holy Baptism and The Holy Communion. The Larger Catechism was expanded to provide more Scripture teaching references for use in instructing pastors for the church. Through the catechisms there is a teaching and nurturing element to sustain and enhance the church's life today.

As we celebrate the riches of this Reformation heritage, let us give thanks and let us, with renewed faith and vigor reach out in loving service in the world God has created and entrusted to us. Thanks be to God. Amen.