

ALWAYS *Reforming*

October 27, 2019 — Reformation Sunday

John 8:31-36

Three weeks ago *Brechin United Church* used our space as a location for a *Covenanting Service* for their new minister. *Brechin* is looking forward to a new way of being church when their construction project is finished. The room was full and there were readings, prayers and promises. Again and again in their prayers, they appealed to God to make them a “*uniting church*.” That’s a different than saying “united.” To me it means that they want to be continually reforming.

This is Reformation Sunday, and most Lutheran congregations are glad to be known as churches of the Reformation. However, that was 500 years ago. There has been a lot of water under the bridge since then. My concern is: are we a “church of the Reformation,” or a “*reforming church*?” The emphasis from our Bishops and councils continually call us to reform our attitudes toward Indigenous brothers and sisters, the environment, and the people we meet each day.

Reforming ourselves is uncomfortable. It wasn’t easy 500 years ago and isn’t easy now, but God’s spirit leads us — to be always reforming.

Reforming

Martin Luther was raised in the Roman Catholic Church as he tried to establish peace with God. He became a monk and priest and later the awkward leader of a reforming movement heavy with politics, angry church authorities and rebellious peasants. He said one time: “*Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about the things that really matter.*” In later years, his wife and family were his joy. When discouraged he found renewal by singing and rejoiced that music had a way of reforming his heart.

Like us, Luther struggled with health issues. He learned to rely on baptism that gave him identity as God’s child when he had ups and downs, raged or bottomed out, or did things he later regretted. He knew he was ‘saint and sinner at the same time’ and God didn’t reject him. On his death bed, he prayed “*Into your hands, I command my spirit. You have saved me, Father, you faithful God.*” The grace of God in Jesus Christ captured his heart in a way that was always reforming him.

Continuing with Jesus

What Jesus did is what people really notice. He welcomed lepers, affirmed women, blessed children, and had time for people. With amazing energy he was reforming his world, his culture and his religion starting with a small group of

followers. He didn't discard past understanding, but was reforming it. With encouragement and forgiveness he sent people back to families and communities with new freedom. He directed the strong to support the weak. When injustice or lack of mercy prevailed, he insisted on repentance. *Truth* came as a person and set us free to live in a new way.

To "continue" in his word, means to remain connected, trusting him. The mark of disciples is so simple and such a challenge: to be a reforming people in a brittle world. "*Continue in my word,*" he says.

And you will know the truth

We sang Luther's famous hymn, *A Mighty Fortress is Our God*:

"Were they to take our house, goods, honour, child, or spouse, though life be wrenched away, they cannot win the day. The kingdom's ours forever."

He penned the words out of hard times. He had abandoned every thought of deserving God's mercy and trusted only Christ. That is what St. Paul calls grace. Friends helped Luther as the love of God flowed through them. Promise and people were the reforming agents of his life.

He said,

"Christ died for me. He made His righteousness mine and made my sin His own; and if He made my sin His own, then I do not have it, and I am free."

Forgiven and accompanied through everything, we belong to God. Luther pointed to Christ ... who forges new beginnings at every turn. God calls a wandering church back to real issues, a real God, and real people.

And the truth will make you free

You are free. Did you know that? If you never did another thing, shared another kindness, made another offering, you remain a child of God. You are free. Free to feel safe. Free to fail. Free to serve. Free to laugh. Free to live. Free to die. Living by grace means freedom spills out and splashes on others.

So this Lutheran pastor spent two days fishing with a Roman Catholic Bishop in August. Our long friendship was reforming. As I arrived in *Tahsis*, he embraced me, we walked down to the dock for supper, and he introduced me to his friends. When I tangled the reel on his big rod the next morning, he just glanced at me and let me figure it out. That night we communed over barbecued salmon and ginger ale. On the boat the following day we talked about parish life and he smiled and laughed with fondness about his time here in a service two years ago. When I finally caught my limit, Gary stopped the boat in *Esperanza Inlet* and said, "*Now you must learn and perform the Fisherman's Salute. I will show you once, then you have to do it. (Left/Right/Vertical: Thank you God!)*"

It is hard to imagine Luther and any Bishop of his day joining in that kind of solidarity. But that was then and this is now. Today we are a reforming church. At least this congregation is because we live with the freedom of Jesus Christ. We can always dare to do what is new and life-giving.

If the Son makes us free, we will be free indeed!

Amen.