

Lesson: Romans 3:19-28
The Gospel: John 8:31-36

Reformation Sunday
October 25, 2020

“Always Being Made New”
Sermon Preached by Lowell D. Nelson
American Lutheran Church of Sun City

Grace and peace be to you through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

Reformation Weekend - wearing red, the joy of proclaiming the Gospel, renewal in each and every age. Renewal 500 years ago during the time known as the Reformation, the revision and the speaking of truth to those in power of the grace of Jesus Christ. The message of God’s love through the Bible, through grace alone, through faith alone, through word alone, to the glory of God alone, continues to reverberate in this age, every age open to the reforming message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

It is also a reminder for the change in every age, the reformation in every age is for our own life, young people being taught the Gospel message, newlyweds forming their lives together based upon their commitment to one another through the blessing of God in marriage, older people renewed in their understanding, being freed perhaps from employment and able to invest time and energy, renewal in every age because of the truth of the Gospel.

Reformation renewal is based upon truth. Truth is a controversial subject these days. We hear terms such as *fake news*, which is an oxymoron because news is meant to be that which helps us to be informed of life, but we now live in a world where we have to discern and to count upon valid sources of truth. I remember during classes, now 25 years ago, one of the professors had mentioned that there is no truth. What he was trying to do was to help us as social work students to not bring our own biases into a situation; but his comment was *truth is there is no truth*. I happened to raise my hand and say “Based upon your assertion, I don’t believe anything you just said.” He said, “What are you talking about?” I said, “Well, you said there is no truth, and yet you made a statement of truth, and how can that be?” The rest of the class had hoped that I could be quiet. I tell you this because there has to be truth in life in which to live, so continue to depend upon the people you love and the source of truth in all understanding, which is God and the love of God and Jesus Christ.

Truth has two components to it. It needs to correspond to reality, and the blessing of the Gospel message is that reality includes the supernatural of God’s love through Jesus Christ. The supernatural of God’s creation of this world and the universe. The supernatural of the Holy Spirit touching our life, so we are not materialists limited only to that which we can see or measure. We know the truth that God’s love is the love incarnate, the love within us through the gift of the Holy Spirit, through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We have a fuller

understanding of the truth. Truth needs to correspond to this great reality and it also needs to cohere; it needs to hold together. Those are the two ways to evaluate if something is truthful. Does it correspond to reality, and in our understanding of fuller reality of God's love; and does it stand together, does it hold together under pressure? In this pandemic year, the truth of the Gospel, the renewal of our life, no matter what age we are in our chronological age, is the truth, the kairos, the inbreaking of God's love, is just as true for us now as it was for Martin Luther 500 plus years ago. This is the gift of the message. God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. This is the truth. This is how we cohere our lives to understand that we are not alone.

In the Romans text, known as the first and chief article of our confession of faith as Lutherans, is it all about the righteousness of God. Thank the Lord for Luther. I feel so sorry that he went through so much to improve his own righteousness, including self-flagellation, constant berating of his own performance until he discovered the truth of the Gospel. It's the righteousness of God that we hold on to. Is the sacrifice of atonement that God put forward in Jesus Christ, and by his blood, effective through our own work? No, faith in God, faith in what Christ has done to show us his righteousness. Sometimes when I preach the Gospel of Grace to some people, it sounds like I am trying just to lower our standards. Brothers and sisters, what I am trying to do is elevate the standards of God, God's character, the righteousness of God, God's relationship for us. This sacrifice of atonement or said differently, atonement. God so desperately and so beautifully in love with his creation and ourselves that he himself is righteous, and he justifies the one who has faith in Jesus, justifying made right. This is the truth.

In the Gospel text itself, it amplifies this message. *If you continue in my word.* Lift that up, do you have a favorite verse of the Bible that you have been able to retain over the years of your life? For confirmation students, perhaps it is something you remember from decades ago. But it is also that encouragement to continue in the Word and learn new parts of the Scriptures that helps you understand the righteousness of God, and in your full confidence upon him. If you know the truth, the truth will make you free! The response by these believers in Jesus is typical human, which is *I have never been a slave, we are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone.* That's not truthful. If you take a look at the people of Israel and certainly of hundreds of years upon hundreds of years of slavery in the land of Egypt. Our normal style is to justify ourselves, we will just say we are not in bondage to anything else and that's why we come and we pray to God to set us free to the truth, to not be limited by our self-justification, our self-righteousness, but to be open to God's righteousness. If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.

The joy of the reformation is the joy of being free by God through Jesus Christ. Luther debated mightily the word *indulgences*. It was used as a mechanism to create freedom in purgatory, to be released from that time and into heaven because of the amount of money given for someone else or perhaps for yourself, to be set free, dependent upon what you gave. It was meant as a means of grace and did nothing, did nothing to benefit the people, because it was always based upon one's self, and one's giving of resources. It was a total destroying of the Gospel message. It is

God's righteousness, it is God's love through Christ that sets us free. Life then is a joyful reformation, reforming day in and day out to this beautiful message. Some days, of course, better than others, but the joy of our church over these past 45 plus years, the joy of the Lutheran church over these 500 plus years, the joy that we are part of the reforming movement of the Catholic Church universal over these thousands of years. In our own life, whether we are young learning the faith, or we have spent years in our middle adulthood or whether we are in our last third of life that there is renewal in every age because the truth is that God loves us and sets us free each and every day. You are free, brothers and sisters, because the Son has set you free. Atonement at onement because of the righteousness of God through Jesus Christ.

That message can't be constrained or contained. That's what the reformation truth is all about. Where we have made mistakes, God forgives and sets us free to reflect this more true nature of God. And in so doing, discover the truth about our dependence upon God's love and our universal love of other sinners in need of God's redeeming, the mutual respect and joy in seeing the message of God's love proclaimed and so on and so forth for time immemorial. God is our refuge and strength. I pray for own year, this year coming up, as we conclude our Pentecost season in the next several weeks that this will be another year of reformation.

Lord, we have had to reform our practices in how we even do church, and how you do your shopping, and the way that you engage in your family. We correspond to those issues which we have to change our life, those external environments in which to love and to serve and to be safe. Brothers and sisters, how powerful it is to be reformed from the inside out. To be reformed by the love of God, the righteousness of God, so that life is a series of freedom statements that the Son has set us free and to boast in the Lord the marvelous creation of God's love through Christ and the ongoing support of the Holy Spirit. It is in this that I know that there is renewal in every age. Praise be to Christ. Amen