

10/27/2019

“Reformation”

Scripture: Joel 2:23-32; 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18; Luke 18:9-14

Series: Living Faith in the Everyday

Theme: God promises restoration, wholeness, and blessing to lives and community, as we live by faith in Christ through the Holy Spirit.

† **At times when we see desolation and division in our lives and our world, it’s good to remember that God is present and promises a new and better future.**

So, where and how do you seek reformation/restoration/transformation in your life, or in others? . . . Maybe it’s your attitude, your health, a personal relationship, a job, the church or some other organization or situation.

The bible tells of many times and circumstances in which God addressed the need for reformation and restoration.

Hundreds of years before the coming of Jesus Christ, we’re not sure just which century even, the prophet Joel proclaimed the word of the LORD to the people of Israel. It was a time of devastation of the land from a massive locust plague and severe draught. He offered these words of hope (Joel 2:23-32). . .

“O children of Zion, be glad and rejoice in the LORD your God; for he has given the early rain for your vindication, he has poured down for you abundant rain, the early and the later rain, as before.

“The threshing floors shall be full of grain, the vats shall overflow with wine and oil.

“I will repay you for the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter, my great army, which I sent against you.

“You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, and praise the name of the LORD your God, who has dealt wondrously with you. And my people shall never again be put to shame.

“You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I, the LORD, am your God and there is no other. And my people shall never again be put to shame.

He proclaims . . .

“Then afterward I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions.

“Even on the male and female slaves, in those days, I will pour out my spirit.

“I will show portents in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke.

“The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and terrible day of the LORD comes.

“Then everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved; for in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the LORD has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the LORD calls.”

So, even in dry and desolate times, in times of hardship, division, and uncertainty, the LORD our God is with us and for us!

Don't focus on the negative, what you are lacking or in need of. Focus on the love and power of God! God says "I will repay you . . . You will eat abundantly and be satisfied, and you will praise the name of the LORD your God who has done wonders for you."

Whatever it is you are in need of, whatever it is you are struggling with, remember that God is present, and promises a new and better future. Focus on God, on Jesus, and his grace will abound for you.

Whether it's a condition made of your own doing or brought upon you by others, remember that God loves and cares for you. God will make a way when there seems to be no way. And even at the very last when there seems no way out -- from temptation, division, hardship or peril -- God will make a way!

From his dungeon cell, after his final missionary journey, being imprisoned by Emperor Nero, the Apostle Paul wrote in his second letter to Timothy (4:6-8, 16-18 (NRSV):

"As for me, I am already being poured out as a libation, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

"At my first defense no one came to my support, but all deserted me. May it not be counted against them! But the Lord stood by me and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and save me for his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen."

† **The Holy Spirit provides forgiveness, healing, restoration, and transformation to lives and communities which call upon God's name with humility and hope.**

If you open the door of your heart, and invite Christ in, the Holy Spirit will reside within you. If you pray and walk with the Lord day by day, each day will lead you further toward your goal.

The Holy Spirit will be poured out upon you. God's forgiveness, grace and loving kindness will reform and transform your life. God will give you strength to run the race, to fight the good fight, and to keep the faith. You will have living faith for the everyday. The Lord will rescue you from every evil and save you for his heavenly kingdom.

So, how have you experienced God's love and grace already?

Have turned your will and your life over to the care of God?

Have you come to know and accept Jesus as your savior and Lord, acknowledging your sins and shortcomings and asking God's forgiveness?

Have you sought and made peace with others?

One of the key ingredients we need for that to take place is humility.

The Gospel of Luke (18:9-14) records this parable of Jesus of a Pharisee and a tax collector. Some Pharisees trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt:

“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee (a devout Jew) and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.’

“But the tax collector (who aided Rome and may have taken advantage of his position for personal gain), standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’

“I tell you,” Jesus said, “this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.”

So in our desire and efforts for reformation and restoration in our lives and relationships, let us remember and pray to be humble as our Lord Jesus was humble.

As we mentioned already . . . Today we celebrate Reformation Sunday. We remember that one of the key tenets of our faith in the Protestant tradition, including Methodism, is salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

We sadly acknowledge the division that was sparked over 500 years ago within the larger Roman Catholic Church, by this thesis of Martin Lutheran. As civil authorities took sides among the kingdoms of Europe, it caused a Thirty Years wars with millions of lives lost through military action and civil disruption. This was partly over a religious doctrinal difference, but it was also about power and control over the people.

Now, thanks I believe to the moving of the Holy Spirit, “In 2017, The Lutheran World Federation and The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity produced a common document, the result of years of conversations: ***From Conflict to Communion: Lutheran-Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017***. This document is both historical reflection as well as statement of “ecumenical imperatives.” It acknowledges that “Repeatedly, we have stood in the way of the good news of the mercy of God.” It hopes that study will result in a “deeper communion of all Christians.”

In fact, the document calls on churches to work “from the perspective of unity and not from the point of view of division.”

As Rev. Jack Seymour goes on to say, “Differences are to be acknowledged and common commitments named, but, more important, the “experience, encouragement, and critique” of the other is honored. What profound advice! Seeking unity, listening respectfully, honoring another’s experiences, and joining in “service to the world” witnesses “to the mercy of God.”
(The Rev. Dr. Jack Seymour, Living Faith in the Everyday -- October 27, 2019, UM Discipleship Resources)

So, where and how is God leading you to “move toward unity and community”?

You or we may have differences, even division, dissolution and even desolation in our lives and our relationships. Yet the good news is that The Holy Spirit provides forgiveness, healing, restoration, and transformation to lives and communities which call upon God's name with humility and hope.

Remember, God promises restoration, wholeness, and blessing to your life and others, as we live by faith together in Christ through the Holy Spirit!

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Questions for Reflection:

Where and how do you seek reformation/restoration/transformation in your life, in others?"

How have you experienced God's love and grace already?

Where and how is God leading you to "move toward unity and community"?