

John 8:31-36 Reformation 2022

Today we celebrate Reformation Sunday, the beginning of the protestant church. Martin Luther posted his 95 theses on the door of the Wittenberg Castle Church on October 31, 1517 and changed the history of the church. From the beginning of organized religion the Roman Catholic Church was the primary power of the Christian Church. Martin Luther's goal was to reform the Roman church, not to break away from it. He felt oppressed by sin until he was studying the Bible and the Holy Spirit gave him insight to understand what a gift we have been given through Jesus the Christ.

And so, rather than trying to physically pay off our debts through making donations to the church and doing penance, Luther realized it is scripture, faith, grace, and Christ that saves us and when we are set free, we are set free indeed.

Scripture tells us that faith comes from God. We believe in God because God created us with a yearning that cannot be filled by anything other than God's presence. People who don't know God try to find any other way to find peace. They look to physical love, food, drugs and alcohol, anything that will ease the yearning they have for connection to something more than themselves. When the connection is made with God it is an aha moment that brings a sense of satisfaction that can be found by no other means.

One of the songs on my Christian music playlist is by Toby Mac "Love Broke Thru". Some of the verses go "I was all but lost in the moment, I was young and running wild then ...." "I did all that I could to undo me but you loved me enough to pursue me.. you took me out of the shadows, made me believe I mattered to you." The chorus, "When love broke through it found me in the darkness wandering through the desert. I was a hopeless fool now I'm hopelessly devoted, my chains are broken, and it all began with you when love broke through."

And when a person who does not know God finds the love and forgiveness that comes from God there is nothing more rewarding. That doesn't mean their addiction will be instantly cured, although it may be, but addictions take time to break; the faith that comes from God can give a person strength to help work through them and become sober.

I believe that Luther may have felt overjoyed when he realized that he was forgiven, that Christ already paid the debt for his, Luther's, sin. And that God's grace, freely given, is what allows us to know forgiveness.

Grace... I've heard grace broken down into an acronym "God's Redemption at Christ's Expense". "God's Redemption at Christ's Expense". Grace is free but it is not cheap. Christ lived on earth, he died an excruciating death, taking the sin of the world upon his body, and his body was placed in a new tomb, one that was not his own but supplied by a covert believer, Joseph of Arimathea. When the women went to perform the ritual anointing of the body, they found the stone that had been in front of the tomb was rolled away and the tomb was empty. Jesus had overcome death. Through the life death and resurrection of Jesus we receive the grace of God.

Why do we need grace? Because there is no way we can earn forgiveness. Forgiveness is given to those who believe that Jesus is the son of God who takes away the sin of the world. We do not have to live under hundreds of laws under which the people of the Old Testament, the Israeli people, lived. We do not have to buy forgiveness with cash or works. We choose to give our money and time and talents freely because we are grateful for what God has done for us, and because we trust God to provide what we need.

Scripture, faith, grace and Christ, all to the glory of God, not to give glory to any human, not to give glory to any institution, but to give God the praise and glory. And what does God require of us? To do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with our Lord.

Under the Justice portal on the ELCA website there is the statement: "As a church we affirm God's call through our 1991 social statement *The Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective*: "Along with all citizens, Christians have the responsibility to defend human rights and to work for freedom, justice, peace, environmental well-being and good order in public life" On that same page we can find where the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is working for justice, and there is information listed to help us to engage in doing justice.

Most people are afraid to step out of their comfort zone and take a stand, but that is exactly what God calls us to do. The justice portal has links to follow to engage in justice issues of economic, gender, women, Native Americans, environmental, inter-religious, diversity, and violence; places where we can take a stand against inequality. God's economy is limitless, there is enough for all people when we walk in love. When we love ourselves we can love others, and when we love others, we love ourselves. Simply standing up to someone who uses humor to enforce prejudices is a way of doing justice.

God requires us to love kindness. It's easy to think we are kind to others. But who are we when we are behind the wheel of a car? I know often when I'm traveling I-90 and I'm told what lane is going to be closed I will move into the open lane. When traffic is especially heavy, and everyone has moved into the correct lane, there are those people who race down the other lane, knowing that someone is going to let them in down the way. I can't say I feel kindly towards those people who are taking advantage of other people's kindness. But didn't Jesus say that when a person asks for your coat give them your coat and your shirt?

And what in fact is humility? Humility is key in relationship with God. Humility is not seeking the high positions but being a servant. Humility is thinking of others. Jesus' example is of one who came to serve, not to be served. Those who seek power for ambition's sake, rather than as an opportunity to serve people, aren't working for the kingdom of heaven but for themselves.

Martin Luther wanted the church to reform, to become more Christ-like, to be true followers of Jesus. He was not perfect, he was human. The only perfect human was Jesus because he was fully human and fully God. Martin Luther tried to have the church embrace the idea that the Bible is the ultimate Christian religious authority and that humans can only get to heaven through faith in God, not by doing good deeds. So the following of what God requires of us as listed in Micah "to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with your Lord" are not going to get us into heaven. Only when we are in a relationship with God through Jesus will we be granted that opportunity. So why do we do what Micah says God commands us to do?

We do this as a response to God's love shown to us through grace that comes from being set free from the oppression of sin by the death and resurrection of Jesus. We do this to build the kingdom of God.

All glory be to God.