**10/29/23**

**Reformation, Trunk or Treat, & The Gospel of Matthew**

**Matthew 22:34-46**

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (2 Corinthians 1:2 NRSV) (2) **Amen.**

Welcome to Reformation Sunday 2023! Welcome to our annual Trunk or Treat with True Deliverance Praise & Worship Center! Welcome to another message from the Gospel of Matthew!

What a day we have on tap here at Holy Spirit Lutheran Church! We get to talk about an event that sparked worldwide change some 500 years ago. I mean without the Reformation you and I would be standing in very different places I am sure, and I guarantee we would not be standing in what we have come to call the Lutheran church. Today we also get to spend time with True Deliverance Praise & Worship Center and our community at our annual Trunk or Treat. Neighbors and strangers come to us in our church yard not just to collect candy. These folks come to us beautiful, ugly, odd, broken, spooky, or scary and we accept them all without question. We compliment them on their costumes, we treat them kindly, and we show them the love of Christ as they go back to their daily lives and communities. We get to show our neighbors the very love that we are urged to show in our Gospel Reading from Matthew today. What better timing for today’s message? How awesome is that?!?!

You know sometimes it is very interesting and even humbling looking back on all of my sermons since 2014. I learn a lot, even from myself and my mindset, over all of these years. I can tell you I definitely read and comprehend a bit differently these days, and some things seem to stick out with more importance than they did over the years. So, this is for sure why this statement holds true for me, and for the church overall, “Rooted in the past and growing into the future, the church must always be reformed in order to live out the love of Christ in an ever-changing world.” (1) Yes, that indeed does say the church! Who is the church? You and I, we are the church! So, that means we are encouraged to continue to grow and change, and be open to continued reform. Sometimes that is easier said than done, and I am sure each and every one of us can admit to that for sure.

Now, when we explore the context of some writings and things said by Luther and several other church leaders in the 1500s there definitely needs to be some change, reform, repair, and even healing going on to this day. Things were definitely said and written back then that cannot be taken back. Things got pretty heated back then at times, and the very arguments and words used brought about a worldwide call for reform and change. However, some things may have been viewed a little differently then, as compared to now. So, what I am essentially saying here is that the church has been repairing some relationships over the years, and it also has been trying to do the very thing that Luther initially set out to do. That is try to fix things and be able to come back together and celebrate our faith from a focus and perspective through the Word. The church is trying to do so in a way that we can be together despite our various beliefs or understandings in practices, but ensure that our focus is indeed a centralized one. Praise be to God for that, for we indeed are stronger together, and that is what God would expect from his children, I am sure.

I am also standing up here today to remind you that the very change and impact on the scope of Catholicism and the Christian Church overall cannot be denied when referencing the Reformation and Martin Luther. “By the end of the seventeenth century, many Lutheran churches celebrated a festival commemorating Martin Luther's posting of the Ninety-five Theses, a summary of abuses in the church of his time. At the heart of the reform movement was the gospel, the good news that it is by grace through faith that we are justified and set free.” (1) However, let’s also be clear here! We are continually reminded that Martin Luther only wanted to right the wrongs in the church. He wanted to simply get things back on track. We are informed and reminded that Martin Luther had no intent to start his own following. He even said, “The first thing I ask is that people should not make use of my name, and should not call themselves Lutherans, but Christians. What is Luther? The teaching is not mine. Nor was I crucified for anyone. St. Paul, in 1st Corinthians 3, would not tolerate Christians calling themselves Pauls or Peters, but only Christians…” (3) Ah yes, Christians. That is the very essence and focus of our faith, a faith built on Christ. So, why do we get things so mixed up when we share our love for our faith, but sometimes solely focus on our religious choice? We are forever reminded that we are called to be one body in Christ, and I am sure over the continued years, and the way that all of these faith backgrounds are getting together we can indeed find a way to come back together in a way to grow stronger. Hopefully, we can find that mutual love and respect that was lost all those years ago when trying to simply reform and change the church in an effort to get back to the heart of the matter. Let us follow the very call in our Gospel Reading today and continue to rekindle our relationships with love.

Now, I have come to realize that I have been blessed to stand up here on two different Reformation Sundays. In 2018 and just last year, in 2022, I was up here, but with different Gospel Readings. Some of you may or may not realize that we are actually always on a three-year rotation with our Gospel Readings, as we explore different sets of readings in our Lectionaries marked A, B, and C. What kind of stinks is that in those previous years we were in John and Luke, and today’s message is from Matthew. I was indeed able to snag some cool information about my Reformation studies and talks from those past years, and I shared some of that with you already. However, there was a completely different learning experience and mindset from the perspective of the Gospel Reading. So, what I am essentially telling you is that we still have a lot more to unpack.

Yes, we do indeed have the awesome realization that we have arrived at yet another Reformation Sunday, some 500 years later. Yes, we can be looking forward to going out in the church yard with True Deliverance Praise and Worship Center and decorating our cars and getting dressed up to greet our neighbors at Trunk or Treat. Nevertheless, we don’t want to glance over or dismiss the lesson provided to us from our Gospel Reading either.

As I mentioned before we get to explore the very love, we are called to show to one another, to ourselves, and most importantly to the Lord our God! Today’s Gospel Reading of course has some more trickery in it. We get to experience another character; we get to encounter a Lawyer. Now we are reminded that, “In our culture, the legal profession is, for the most part, separate from our religious institutions. However, for the Jew living in Jesus’ day, the Pharisees and the Priests often served as judges over disputes among the faithful. So, this lawyer puts before Jesus the question, “Which commandment in the law is the greatest.” But Jesus didn’t answer this question from a legal point of view. He wasn’t going to fall into the trap of debating the significance of various laws. Rather, Jesus answered the question from the point of view of living our life as faithful children of God, as people called to live our lives in relationship with God’s will. Thus, Jesus responded by stating that the first and greatest of all of the commandments is to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” It was a quotation of the Shema, the ancient confession of faith which was recited twice daily, each morning and evening, by the Jews of his day. It was a statement of faith designed to remind the Jewish people of their covenant relationship with God. Then, Jesus adds, “And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all of the law and the prophets.” (4)

That is some pretty heavy stuff there. I guarantee this Lawyer did not expect an answer quite like this. I am sure he was rather smug, and was expecting to stump what he believed was some dumb or ordinary carpenter standing in front of him. This is why I often say do not look on the person from the outside, and focus on the heart. If this Lawyer would have used any ounce of his education and intuition, he would have realized he was dealing with Jesus, and not just some dumb or ordinary carpenter. He would have seen and felt the heart of the man in front of him. He would have possibly even tailored his question and expected something similar to the very response he received. However, he didn’t, and he got what he deserved indeed!

Let me start wrapping things up here today with a funny story I read while doing my research. “A professor of theological ethics opened his class for the semester by reading a letter from a parent to a government official. The parent complained that his son, who had received a good education, gone to all the right schools, and was headed for a good job as a lawyer, had gotten involved with a weird religious sect. The father continued that the members of this sect controlled his every move, told him whom to date and whom not to date (relationships), and had taken all of his money (sharing). The parent pleaded with the government official to do something about this strange religious group. Then the professor asked the students, "Who is this letter describing?" There was quite a debate, with the class discussing some off the wall group cults, like the Branch Dividend’s, or those who were going to join the spaceship at the tail of Haley’s Comet. After about 15 minutes of discussion, the Professor revealed that the letter was from a third century Roman parent, concerned about a group of people called.... Christians.” (5)

Pretty interesting, right? Did you all think that this parent was fuming about Christians? We learn in the tail end of our Gospel Reading today that Jesus also had his own brand of trickery, or way to get others to think. He asked who they thought he was. They were so convinced on having an answer that their answer was actually wrong. He educated them on who he was, and what his divine nature and purpose was. It is very interesting to see that he kind of stumped them, or brought them back to such a perspective that they never questioned him again. Let us not be like them, and let us continue to talk to and question our Lord. Let us question him on how to show that continued love and respect to our neighbors so that we honor and glorify the Lord our God with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our mind.

Amen.

**References**

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(2) Bible.com

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 The Greatest Commandment

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 Scripture: Matthew 22:34-46

 Denomination: Lutheran

**Reformation Day**

**Tuesday, October 31, 2023**

 By the end of the seventeenth century, many Lutheran churches celebrated a festival

 commemorating Martin Luther's posting of the Ninety-five Theses, a summary of

 abuses in the church of his time. At the heart of the reform movement was the

 gospel, the good news that it is by grace through faith that we are justified and set

 free.

 Jesus’ summary of the law in today’s gospel echoes our first reading from

 Leviticus. We are called not only to love God with heart, soul, and mind, but also

 to love our neighbor as ourselves. It is out of such deep care that Paul shares the

 gospel with the Thessalonian community. In the confession of sins, we

 acknowledge that we have not loved God, neighbor, and self; yet we gather to

 hear the word of forgiveness and to be strengthened by word and meal to be

 signs of God’s love and mercy in the world.

**Matthew 22:34-46**

 Put on the spot by the Pharisees, Jesus displays wisdom by summarizing the law

 of God in just two commandments and by demonstrating the Messiah must be

 more than the son of David.

 34When the Pharisees heard that [Jesus] had silenced the Sadducees, they

 gathered together, 35and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test

 him. 36“Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” 37He said to

 him, “ “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul,

 and with all your mind.’ 38This is the greatest and first commandment. 39And a

 second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ 40On these two

 commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

 41Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them this

 question: 42“What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son is he?” They said to

 him, “The son of David.” 43He said to them, “How is it then that David by the

 Spirit calls him Lord, saying,

 44‘The Lord said to my Lord,

 “Sit at my right hand,

   until I put your enemies under your feet”’?

 45If David thus calls him Lord, how can he be his son?” 46No one was able to

 give him an answer, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more

 questions.