

October 28, 2018 Reformation Sunday
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Peace Lutheran Church – Austin, Texas

GOSPEL

John 8:31-36

This holy gospel according to Saint John, the eighth chapter.

Glory to you, O Lord.

³¹Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; ³²and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” ³³They answered him, “We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying, ‘You will be made free’?”

³⁴Jesus answered them, “Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. ³⁵The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there forever. ³⁶So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.”

The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Christ.

This Reformation Sunday...I find myself so hungry the reforming Spirit of God...as much as ever. I don't know about you. I want God to be on the move...changing the world...The world needs changing. Reforming. Remaking into its original goodness before so many things went so horribly wrong. We need the reforming Spirit of God...still...always.

I have often wondered if it is a product of our time...or maybe something else...but it seems to me like many of us don't exactly relate to the struggle of Martin Luther's early life. Or, if we do, we don't talk about it.

I'm not sure we are wracked by fear that we are too awful...to full of evil...to ever be able to come close to the God we so wish to know. I don't know if our struggle is like his. But I know we struggle. Do we struggle.

We know what it is to feel like we are helpless passengers in our own lives...which feel beyond our control. We have felt the clenching fear that we are about to tumble out of the sky...gasping for breath in the thin air around us...which is too indifferent to do anything but let us fall through it.

Luther found his freedom...found his life. He found a way to stop the free fall. He found what the church calls the gospel...the good news, it means. He found promise of God's loving grace that brought him back to life...or maybe that made him truly alive for the first time...

I don't know if that word – gospel – stirs anything in your heart. But I hope you know the feeling of it, even if the name doesn't move you. I hope you know how it feels...to take the first breath after you break the surface of the water...how it feels to have arms that wrap around you in an embrace that lets the knot in your stomach loosen and your shoulders release like Atlas letting the world roll off your back...I hope you know how it feels to look into the eyes of someone and realize in their answering look what it feels like to be truly seen...I hope you know what it feels like to come alive. If you know that...then you have felt the gospel.

This freedom...this joy...the immensity of God's grace...is what we celebrate when we remember Martin Luther and the events of five hundred and one years ago. We remember and rejoice in the good news of a God who pulls us out of death and into life through the water of baptism...who enfolds us in safety like a mighty fortress...who truly knows and loves us in a truth of who we really are.

And sometimes...this is where we sort of stop. Some days, maybe we stop there because it's as far as we can go...because we have only just become free...become able to breathe again...to believe again that we are worth loving and living. Perhaps we need to sit and breathe in our freedom for a moment.

Then time passes...and it becomes clear that, while we are freed and loved...too much of the rest of the world is still captive...alone...afraid...Too many are

still underwater...or tumbling out of the sky...or pushed to the edges of the world in the cold fog of invisibility. Like Luther, we realize that the world is starving for the food we have been given.

For Luther, this realization is why everything that happened after his great freeing discovery happened. Because once he wasn't tormented by fear for his own life...he saw how many others were captive to fear and oppression. He couldn't rest in his own freedom.

And he didn't...even to the point of risking his life.

This is the other side of the gospel coin...once we are truly alive...we are able to perceive the suffering of the world around us...and we cannot unknow it once we learn...and we cannot be satisfied...we cannot rest while others are still under water...unloved...unsafe...

I was thinking about this recently. And about that announcement we all ignore while we try to sneak in a few more minutes on our phones before airplane mode: "In case of a loss of cabin pressure, oxygen masks will fall from the panel above your head. Pull the mask over your nose and mouth and breath normally. Oxygen is flowing even if the bag does not inflate. Please secure your own mask before helping others."

The gospel is the air we breathe. It saves us. Until we can breathe, we can't try to do anything else.

But...once we can...well...the goal...of course... is that *everyone* gets to breathe. So, once we can breathe again...we look for who can't. This is both metaphorical and deathly literal. It was for Luther...who was concerned about the material well-being of God's children, as much as their spiritual well-being.

In the past few days...we have seen that God's beloved children are not safe...not in body or in spirit.

And...in light of the attack on the congregations at Tree of Life synagogue...perhaps the most deadly attack on Jewish people on American soil...we should also pause on this Reformation Sunday to acknowledge that it took until 1994 for the ELCA to repudiate the anti-Semitism in Luther's late writings. And those writings...in addition to even our sacred texts...have been used by far too many who would seek to harm our Jewish siblings.

Brother Luther had beautiful ideas that were better than he, himself, was. His words have helped free many...but they have also propped up the kind of hatred that led eleven Jewish people to be murdered in their house of worship yesterday.

So, so many...too, too many beloved ones have had crosshairs painted over the image of God they bear...and our thoughts and prayers are not bullet proof...but our love...our reaching out...out of our own freedom...to help ensure that everyone can breathe...can live...this is the work that follows the good news.

This is, perhaps, how the Spirit of the Reformation chooses to continue to beat her wings...through the loving action of those freed and made alive again in God.

May you know the gospel in your own life...which is to say...may you be brought back to life where you are dead. May you be given air to breathe when you are gasping. May you be embraced and safe.

And may God give us hearts to make the whole world an expression of the joy and truth that this good news...this life...is truly for all people.

Spirit of Reformation. Stay with us. Be in this world. Bring us to life. Urge us to action. We need you so, so much.

Please.

Amen.

