

## **Reformation and Confirmation Sunday 2020**

**Grace and peace to you from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ...**

There's a story that I heard years ago about an old man who lived in a very run-down city... trash and broken glass was everywhere – graffiti covered all of the buildings - the politicians were all corrupt – crime was rampant – and gangs had taken over the neighborhood...

And every single morning the old man would go down to the street below and yell out, “Only God can save us!”...

This went on for weeks (and then months) without fail - until finally one day the old man was met by a larger – more intimidating man – who didn't appreciate the constant talk about God...

And so he said to the old man, “You know, I don't know why you're wasting your time... I mean, just take a look around – this world belongs to Satan – and all of your yelling and screaming about God saving the world isn't going to change anything... in fact, the people who live in this city hate God – and what's more – they hate you”...

The old man didn't seem too surprised at what was being said – but after a few moments spoke up to say, “You know, you're right... all of my yelling and screaming about God's love to save - may not change the world – but one thing is for sure – as long as I speak up (I can prevent the world from changing me”)...

Today, as you know, churches all around the world celebrate Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation... and how, he too, spoke up for what he believed...

As the story's told – Luther was a 16<sup>th</sup> century monk living not only in Germany at the time, but he also belonged to a Church that was heavily corrupted by worldly interests – a Church that was teaching doctrine that could not be supported by the Word of God – and was ultimately taking advantage of people's ignorance (namely through the sale of (what was called, ‘Indulgences’) or a ‘financial system that was created by the Roman Catholic Church – where if a person paid money – the amount of time they (or their loved ones) would be punished in death for their sins - would be reduced)... sort of the ‘Bingo’ of Luther's day...

And we know now that the money - that was basically stolen from millions of Europeans at the time - (did not save souls), but rather, helped to build the beautiful and luxurious – St. Peter's Basilica...

And all the while the poor were ignored – the outspoken were either jailed or sentenced to death as heretics, and with threats of Eternal Damnation the Church (which was being hijacked by the ruling elite) kept a muzzle on dissension (and used a twisted version of the Christian faith to keep control over the people)... namely – a theology of fear and intimidation... doubled over with ignorance...

This is why Martin Luther decided to nail his 95 Theses on the doors of Castle Church in Wittenberg on October 31<sup>st</sup>, 1517... and his argument was simple (and still holds true today) – that only the Bible can be the central religious authority of the Christian faith (and not the Pope – or a Church – because both are fallible) and that humans could only be saved by the Grace and love of God (and not by their works)... otherwise, Luther believed, we wouldn't need a savior... we wouldn't need Jesus Christ if we could save ourselves or pay away our sins...

And to support this claim Luther pointed to our second reading this morning from the letter to the Romans, chapter 3 as evidence for his argument, where it says these words, *“since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith”*...

And then goes on to say, *“it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies the one who has faith in Jesus.”*

In other words, God's Word teaches us that we are saved by faith (and not our good deeds)... that salvatoion is a free gift of Grace for all who believe in Jesus Christ (one that's not earned and certainly cannot be controlled by the Pope)... this is why – Luther explained – it's called Good News...

As you can imagine, the Pope wasn't very happy with Luther (and history tells us that Luther's life was threatened because he did speak up) ... in fact, Luther had to go on the run for a bit as a fugitive – and then go into hiding... and some even questioned his sanity (as he continued to stand up to the Pope – and he continued to speak up – even when it was unpopular to do so)...

And nowhere in the story of Martin Luther do we read that he was trying to change the world ... but we celebrate his courage every Reformation Sunday (because with faith in the power of Jesus Christ to guide him) - Luther refused to let the world - change him...

You know, in many ways the Rite of Confirmation is, at least in essence, standing up for what you hold to be true... it's finding your voice (and telling the world what you believe) and who you are (as a beloved Child of God) – something we couldn't do at our baptism (since most of us were babies and unable to speak for ourselves)... but we do so today – on the day of Confirmation... which is why it is such a special day (and one that we cherish) – even if they won't let us have a cake after the service...

To Shane, and Ryen, and Wesley – first of all, I want to tell you that I truly enjoyed my time with you (in fact, our class was actually our first ecumenical confirmation class – as we started out with 6 other confirmands from St. Elizabeth's Chapel) and we learned together that all people can come together – even people of different religions – when the love of Christ is present)...

I also loved learning about your lives - and hearing about your highs and your lows – the stories related to school and sports, family and friends, and even your hopes for tomorrow... I always appreciated your questions and your insights... and some of you surprised me at times with the depth of your faith and the beauty of your prayers... and I have been amazed at the strength and fortitude you have shown throughout this pandemic...

In my opinion – I think you're truly remarkable young people (who not only have bright futures - but also an abundance of gifts)... and the greatest of all your gifts (is your faith in Jesus Christ) – that you will take with you (no matter where the road of life should lead you) and it's our hope that it will sustain you (until you stand in the presence of our Lord and Savior)...

And yes, it's true that the world might not appreciate your faith – the world may even try to change you (and take away your gift of faith)

But with the love of Jesus Christ (may you become the change you would like to see in this world)... and know that on this Confirmation Day (it is not the end of the journey) but the beginning of an adventure (with God to guide you along the way)... and we all pray *that you will always find reason* to speak up for what you believe – not just today (but always)... because God's love is eternal (and it will be with you wherever you go)...

And so, let me close with words that were first spoken by Martin Luther (that I believe are very appropriate – not only for the Day of Reformation - but also for

the day of Confirmation) as we all think about what it means to be a Christian in this world...

Listen to what Luther believed... he writes these words, *“This life therefore is not righteousness, but growth in righteousness, not health, but healing, not being but becoming, not rest but exercise. We are not yet what we shall be, but we are growing toward it, the process is not yet finished, but it is going on, this is not the end, but it is the road. All does not yet gleam in glory, but all is being purified.”*

In a few moments the three of you will stand with us – and it’s my hope that you not only find your voice (but that you always remember that you are precious in the eyes of God) and fellow servants with us (in the Kingdom of Heaven)...

May the power of the Holy Spirit be with us on every road that we travel... may our hope in the Promises of God be our strength to sustain us in difficult days... and may we know of our Lord’s love on this day and evermore...

In Jesus’ name we pray...

**Amen!**