

I think this homily is going to be just a little different than normal for me. My thought processes for today began when I started researching answers for the simple question I was asked last Sunday – why do **we** wear red on Reformation Sunday? Of course, I could have stated the obvious answer that red is **my** favorite color. I am hopeful you could tell, however, that I decided in my children’s moment to try to provide a relatively correct answer. I then also began to wonder how much **you all** know about the history of the Reformation and maybe even about church history in general. Of course, for the record, I am by no means an expert but maybe I can share a few helpful insights.

Some years ago, I had the privilege of hearing United Methodist pastor, Robert Hicks, address the Alaska Synod Council about the roughly 500 year cyclical pattern in church history. His point at that time was that the church is in the midst of another 500 year upheaval. So, in my preparation for today, I discovered an article written in 2014 about internationally respected author, authority on religion, and scholar, Phyllis Tickle. I would not be surprised if this article was not a basis for Robert’s comments to that Synod Council. In the article, Phyllis identifies several questions religions have a responsibility to address constantly. The questions Phyllis identified are: “What is the **future** of faith?”, “How **now** shall we live?”, “Where is **the** authority?”, and “**Who** is in charge?”. Phyllis says that by addressing these questions regularly, religion has the possibility of meeting its obligation to cultures and societies.

Many scholars today believe the church and religion in general are in the midst of another great upheaval often called by scholars, the Great Emergence. In 2017, however, the Lutheran church and some other denominations as well came together to celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. Does anyone know why? Well because on October 31st, 1517, the Reformation began when Martin Luther nailed his famous 95 theses on the door of the Wittenberg Castle. There are now more than 37,000 different denominations worldwide.

In the eleventh century, five hundred years before the Reformation, the church went through what is often called the Great Schism. This was when the church split into Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy. Five hundred years before that was the decline and fall of the Roman Empire which had significant cultural, political, and religious impact. And 500 years before that was what is often called the period of Great Transition or Great Transformation. This period coincided with the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

Now, I do not know for sure, but I am pretty sure that neither Jesus nor Martin Luther anticipated or wanted their names to be used as **roots** in the names of major religions around the world, but they are. I think it is also important to note that Phyllis points out in the article that during these times of upheaval that **core** beliefs do not change. Only the way **they** are presented and practiced changes. The old version of Christianity does not die but it **does get** reconfigured. The Roman Catholic Church, for example, has survived long past the Reformation.

Many churches today are choosing to adjust their focus back onto our common beliefs rather than those beliefs that separate us. These common or core beliefs are the true basis of our faith and our religion. Many churches are working to come together but still many churches continue to focus on what makes them different. This attitude actually inundates and permeates all of our society and we see it being played out on a grand scheme every day in our politics. It is based, as we often talk about in the Monday Faith Journey Bible study, on our ego. It is about us, we are right and you are wrong, it is my way or the highway. This, my friends, is not what **I** see in Jesus' actions or teachings.

So, what was the issue with the church and the Pope for Martin Luther in 1517. You can read the 95 theses for yourself online but let me try to summarize the gist of the issue. Martin Luther was a "Father", a monk, a priest, and a learned scholar. Kind of like Paul in a way. But try as hard as he could, Martin could not find salvation peace. Yet, Martin knew that the church offered salvation peace to its members through their actions of money. Martin spent a great deal of time studying Paul's writings, most especially those in Romans like our reading today. Martin came to believe that our salvation is not about us, or our actions, but rather it is about God and God's actions in Jesus. In fact, Martin came to believe that actions of the church at that time were entirely about increasing the grandeur, money and power of the church. Once again, I think this sounds very familiar both within the church and within our politics, and within our society in general.

Each of our readings today have verses focusing on the glory, mercy, and power of God and what God's actions do for us, especially the Romans reading. Martin Luther essentially said that salvation is the relationship between each individual and God. Martin also wrote great hymns and worked to have the Bible put into the hands of individual believers.

Reformation Sunday gives us a chance to remember **our** faith journey and to tell our it. Reformation Sunday is a chance to remember the most important things. Martin Luther insisted that we are not forgiven because of anything we do – including the **buying** of indulgences or **doing enough** good works. We are forgiven, instead, because of who God is, a God full of grace and mercy. Reformation Sunday challenges us to do better. To **try** to emulate Jesus and to, as Paul said, have the same attitude and mind as Jesus, you know, that of servanthood.

Martin Luther said: "*The true gospel indeed is, that works of charity are not the ornament or perfection of faith: but that faith of itself is God's gift and God's work in our hearts.*"

Martin Luther also said: "*I put my trust in no man on earth, nor in myself, my power, my learning, my wealth, my piety, nor anything that I may have. I put my trust in no creature in heaven or on earth. I **dare** to put my trust only in the one absolute, invisible, incomprehensible God, who made heaven and earth, and who alone is over all creatures.*"

Martin Luther had a lot to say including these words as well: "*This evil is planted in all human hearts by nature: if God were willing to sell God's grace, we would accept it more quickly and gladly than when God offers it for nothing.*"

Hear then the good news:

Chad Bird said: "*There comes a point in every believer's life when you realize you had everything backward: you thought you were holding on to the promises of God and you realize, no, those promises were holding on to you with an iron grip. You supposed that you were striding along the path of holiness but, no, you, an unholy sinner, are being borne along on the shoulders of the Holy One of God. You thought you had a tight grip on the word and work of Jesus but, no, you were held captive, seized, nailed to Jesus himself, with whom you co-die and are co-buried and rise to newness of life. You silly Christian, **you never** had a single thing to do with it; it was all done to and for you while God, for a time, just let you carry on your little daydream that you had a little skin in the game of salvation. But now you awake to the reality; it was Jesus, Jesus, only Jesus, all along, doing it all **for** you and **in** you.*"

One last saying from Martin Luther: "*Faith therefore acknowledges that in this one person, Jesus Christ, it has forgiveness of sins and eternal life.*"

Grace and peace to you, my friends. I wish you - faith.

Amen