

Homily – October 25, 2026

As we've already said several times this morning, today is Reformation Sunday. And Luther, being one of God's prophets, called the church to reformation.

Believe me, every day, even though Luther is now a pastor, we are still being called into reforming: reforming ourselves through the power of God, sola fide, sola gratia, and reforming God's church. Which, if you listen to Max when he said, "Good morning, church," we are the church, not this building. You and I are the church called to being reformed.

Remember, Luther tells us that each night we die to the old self, and each morning we get a whole new chance. We are a new creation in Christ to live in that freedom of being reformed and shaped by God's grace. A Sunday school teacher taught me now 60-plus years ago that grace stands for "God's response at Christ's expense."

You know, as I was thinking about Luther's journey to being a prophet and one who called the church to reformation, I was struck this time that his journey began in a storm.

He was supposed to be a lawyer, as far as his parents thought, because they wanted him to be able to take care of them in their old age. And so he was going back to school from home, and he got caught in this horrible, horrible storm. And he thought he was going to die. So he prayed to Saint Anne and promised that if he would live, he would become a monk.

You know, as I think about that part of Luther's story, I wonder how many of our own reformations, our own reshaping, our own changes happen when a storm comes in our own life, and even in the life of faith communities. You know, it's said of humans that we will only do the hard work of change if it is more painful to stay where we are than it is to change.

Sometimes it takes a storm for us to be reformed.

The good news is, as Christians, we know that we don't walk through that storm alone. Christ is right there beside us, holding us up, giving us the strength to do that reformation.

So Luther kept his promise. He kept his promise to Saint Anne and to God, and he became a monk. And he tried so hard to be in a right relationship with God. Being in a right relationship with God means putting God first, God being our priority rather than the priorities that the world invites us to. No matter what he did, no matter how much he fasted, no matter how much he beat himself, no matter how much he prayed, no matter what, he could not live in that right relationship.

He was enslaved by sin, just like you and I were before our Lord and Savior died for our sins and gave us new life.

So Luther was asked to become a professor, and believe it or not, one of his books to teach was Romans.

And all of a sudden, the Word was opened to him. And the Holy Spirit enlightened him to what one of the verses in Romans said. It's actually Romans 1:17.

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The righteousness of God is revealed by faith in Jesus Christ, who has accomplished the righteousness for you.

Luther read that truth and freedom happened in his life. He was reformed and reshaped by the knowledge that nothing he could do would change his life, but it was done for him by the blood and sacrifice of his Lord and Savior.

That truth for Luther is also our truth. That reformation power that Luther received through the Holy Spirit is also available for us to be reformed and reshaped by God's love, by God's mercy, by God's grace, God's response at Christ's expense. We have that available to each of us, to the world, to everyone.

And reformation of ourselves and reformation of God's church and of God's world starts with accepting God's gift of grace through faith.

Now this Sunday we begin our stewardship campaign, Future with Hope. And it's God's grace that allows us to live into the trust that indeed individually we have a future with hope, and as a faith community we certainly have a future with hope. No matter what the world tells you, don't believe it. Because of God's grace, we can hold on to that truth and lean into it and live into that truth because of faith.

So our stewardship question of today is: how has this future with hope been revealed to you? How have you seen God working in your life to give you hope?

Nadory was supposed to be the one who shared her testimony. Unfortunately, she is very sick and at home. We pray for her recovery. And so I get the privilege to share some of my testimony with you.

The reason I'm putting this on is this was the first stole I received, and it was given to me from my home church that helped me discover God's call in my life to be a parish pastor. So this is a very special stole to me.

So my story begins in a storm as well, in a storm after I divorced my husband. And many of you have heard my story of abuse and my husband's infidelity and my own response to his abuse. I think I've shared with some of you, I knew it was time for me to leave the relationship when he struck me and I struck him and his glasses flew across the room. I knew that was not who God had called me to be.

Divorce certainly wasn't an easy decision in my family and in my extended family because we held the value that those vows that you said in front of God and in front of your family and loved ones were not just a legal agreement, but they were covenantal. They were a sacred promise. And I was going to break a sacred promise.

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But I could see no other way out. I had tried counseling. I had tried separation. We had tried all of this. And I could see no other way out. Like Luther was looking for a way to live a righteous life with God and failing miserably on his own, I did the same thing. I tried to save my marriage on my own. Finally, I got smart and relied on God's grace, on God's forgiveness, and God's mercy.

So, I got divorced.

My mother was not supportive of that at all. To her defense, I had not told her this whole story that was going on. So, she didn't know the whole story. She only knew parts of it.

But because of my decision, she stopped talking to me, stopped supporting me. We were estranged. And for those of you who know me, know how important my mother's witness to faith in God formed and shaped me. And now her departure from my life at that time was one of the most painful departures I've ever experienced. The person who gave me God was out of my life for a season.

I left Tennessee. I moved to Connecticut. I had friends there, and I got a job there. I started to build a life there, but another storm hit. The newspaper that I was the advertising manager of, had been around for 100-plus years, closed. And I had three weeks to find a job because I had nothing in the bank. I had no way to live without employment.

This is where God's grace, God's response at Christ's expense, really showed up in the guiding.

I connected with everyone I knew in the newspaper industry. Even if they were in supplying and sending and providing paper, I called them. I called everybody. And I ended up in a job in Tallahassee, Florida, for the Florida Press Association.

During my drive from Connecticut to Florida, I was in a Dodge Colt. If anybody remembers Dodge Colts, they're really, really small. And I had all of my plants and all of my things that couldn't go in a moving truck. And I wrestled with God in that 24-hour period. It's my own Jacob story. No, my name didn't get changed, and I don't walk funny because God struck my hip.

But I came away from that journey knowing that I had to return to a faith community to deepen my walk with God. That's where my ohana would be then. That's where my community would come from, as I was estranged from my family.

Well, a few Sundays later, sort of like Luther, I kept my promise to God and I guess to myself. I started looking for a faith community and I, of course, being a cradle Lutheran, went to a Lutheran church. What I didn't check was those four letters after Lutheran.

I grew up Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, which means I still couldn't be a pastor. But God had the first church I discovered be an Evangelical Lutheran Church in America that had been welcoming female pastors since the 80s.

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I walked into that church and God's grace was there in the form of Miss Louise. You don't know how important what you do out there is to those that are coming here. Miss Louise, oddly enough, was about the same age as my mother. Oddly enough, someone might say God-incidence, some might say coincidence, oddly enough, looked very similar to her.

And Miss Louise didn't even say hello to me. She just grabbed me in her arms and welcomed me. This is the most welcoming hug I ever experienced. Again, God's grace showing up in the midst of the storm.

Maybe this was God's way of telling me that at some point my relationship would be restored with my mom and would be even stronger for the storms that we would withstand and would conquer in the future.

St. Stephen Lutheran Church in Tallahassee, Florida, was the church that would continue to help me understand the gift of God's grace. It would be the church that would be my ohana even till this day. It was the church that showed me God's love that invited me to live into God's plan for me.

That was the church that reminded me that indeed each day I am made, through the gift of God's grace, a new creation in Christ. This was and still is the church that taught me that God has a plan to prosper us all. Our future can indeed be filled with hope.

So now it's your turn. In your bulletin, there is a sheet of paper with the question, and we invite you to tell your story. However many words you want, you can write; if you want to draw a picture of your encounter with God's grace that has given you hope, do that.

What you will find through this stewardship season is these pieces of paper will be growing on those windows there so that we could all be part of one another's story, God's story and our story intertwined.