Reformation Day (Observed) 2020

The Reformation of the western church in the sixteenth century was an important and major historical event. No one claims that it did not happen. However, there are many different opinions of what it meant **for** the church.

From the view of Vatican City in Rome, the Reformation legitimized the heretic Martin Luther and thus began the proliferation of protestant sects numbering in the thousands. Luther is blamed for breaking papal authority and opening the door for all these denominations, each one claiming to have the truth.

For us who bear the name Lutheran, we are grateful to God that the truth of the Gospel was restored which always comforts the guilty sinner by the free forgiveness of Christ. Together with St. Paul we rejoice in being justified by faith apart from the works of the law.

Yet sadly, there is no agreement between worldwide Lutherans on such important matters as whether the accounts of the bible are factual and historical or merely metaphorical and symbolical. Also, does the law of God still have anything to say to us who are freed by the Gospel? Antinomianism teaches that only gospel applies to the Christian. So, if the law of God no longer applies to us, that leaves us to do what is right in our own eyes and the truth is left wide open, so that every one decides what if truth for them. (Post-modernism)

As we celebrate the Reformation today, is it only a historical event we are remembering? Or is there anything about it that is ongoing and important for our lives today?

Our Lord answers that when he said that by remaining in His word, we will know the truth and the truth will set us free.

Abide in my word

What does that mean exactly? Are we supposed to read the bible only and constantly, denouncing anything else? Is it wrong to sing hymns written by poets throughout the centuries or should we stick to singing the psalms exclusively?

Abide in the word means to remain in it. If Jesus is the very word of God made into human flesh, then to remain in him becomes clear. Of course, He allows us to read other books and to sing hymns other than the ones inspired verbally by the Holy Spirit, that is the book of psalms in the Old Testament.

Remain in Christ does not mean that I brought myself to Jesus, but the opposite. Christ got a hold of me. He changed me by absolving me. What comfort to know that He won’t let go of me. So, to remain in Him means that it is never a good idea to tear yourself away from Him. The branch that cuts itself off from the Vine, who is Christ, withers and dies.

Yet when the bible is held to be only a man-made book of fairy tales and some good morals, the tearing away from Christ is made easier. Then it is easy to deny the Virgin-birth of Christ, His bodily resurrection and His return on the Day of Judgment.

If the law of God no longer exists for the forgiven sinner, then the tearing away of Christ is made easier by holding that we can do anything, for God’s Judgment no longer applies to us and we are no longer accountable for our actions.

The teaching of mortal sins is important here. And should not be forgotten. There are some sins when committed, drive out the Holy Spirit and kills faith. The examples from the bible are David who committed adultery and lost his faith. Peter denied Christ three times and hurled himself into the possibility of Christ denying him before the Father. Antinomianism forgets that sins retain their consequences even when forgiven.

The Truth shall set you free

When Christ grabs a hold of you, the teaching of the Reformation becomes more than a historical event. The Reformation’s single most important teaching is what St. Paul taught in that we are made holy and righteous before God as a gift found only in Christ Jesus. St. Paul wrote: *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.*

As God’s teaching changed Christians in 1517, it has also changed you in 2020. Christ has set you free, not from the law but from the law’s just punishment. Jesus came not to abolish the law but to fulfill it. So we still teach the 10 commandments as God’s word, worthy of our learning and the sure truth that guides us.

If Christ had not grabbed a hold of us, we would still be in our sin. We are all born into slavery to sin and Satan, unable to know or experience freedom from it. In the same way that a child does not know anything different from what it knows. So, we would only know what it meant to be captured by sin and death.

There is a difference between a freed slave and a runaway. Although the runaway is free in one sense, he remains forever bound by the fear of being recaptured and punished. The slave who has been freed by the Son of God, is truly free.

Jesus sets you free by absolving you. He speaks the forgiveness and His father honours it. Therefore, Christ gives you a place in His father’s House that is eternal. Christ shares the inheritance with us, poor lowly sinners, and is glad about it, never jealous.

Now what is true for us individual Christians applies also to us corporately as church, since God only has one family. That is so important now as we live with the daily threat of the corona virus. The danger of getting it has changed the way people gather together. That can change the way we look at church. Coming together as church could be seen as a threat to get infected.

Do you think of church now as a threatening place to get sick or a place of healing to get better? Has covid 19 influenced us to think of church as a leper colony or is it God’s pharmacy that dispenses the medicine of immortality and the antidote to death?

Before this virus came, we were under the influence of the world, our culture and the government, in thinking about church. So, we came to think of church as democratic where the majority rules instead of God’s truth. The office of the keys was neglected as the rule of the majority was honoured. Our way of doing church took on the form of running a business. We talk about the financial bottom line, our donations that keep the church going, and get easily discouraged over all the things left undone at church. Don’t you worry about who will get the work done here?

The truth of Jesus breaks in and reminds us that He is still here where two or three are gathered and where they remain in His written word, not do what they jolly well please. There is no place in holy Scripture to think of church as a business where stakeholders gather to make more members.

The word of God does give us a picture of church as a heavenly bride, the bride of Christ. Is it time for a Reformation to think of church in terms of a marriage instead of a business or a threatening place to get sick? Our bridegroom Christ Jesus is here to give us life not death and not to take anything from us but to make us holy and righteous. Christ is here to make us white by his red spilled blood.

We sure need His ongoing Reformation and what a joy to hear him say to each one of us “Stay with me and let me still love you for I have set you free to love me and keep my Word.