

## **REFORMATION SUNDAY OCTOBER 31, 2010 CYCLE "C"**

### **TITLE: THE REFORMATION: BE THANKFUL FOR GOD HAS BLESSED US ABUNDANTLY**

**READINGS: Jer. 31:31-34, Ps. 46, Rom. 3:19-28, John 8:31-36**

Today is a very significant anniversary. Bet you are wondering who is celebrating 50, 60 or even 70 years together. Well, it's not a wedding anniversary at all. Today we are celebrating the 493<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of the Reformation. For it was on Halloween, October 31, 1517 that Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the door of the Cathedral in Whitenberg, Germany. This began a religious revolution which had been brewing for many years, actually ever since the time of Otto I in 962. Now with Luther's theses or statements of reform the movement took on an irreversible direction. There had been a tremendous need for doctrinal, political, economic, cultural and religious reform which was culminated in the tremendous work of Martin Luther.

When Luther was a young monk at Erfurt, Germany he strove desperately to be the kind of man he understood God wanted and he was instructed by his superiors to be. He was, however, troubled, worried and haunted by his sins. So he did all the good works he was told to do and even much more. He fasted, he prayed, he kept himself from sleep. He read the Bible constantly. But there was no satisfaction, no joy to his faith. He was obsessed by the fear of hell. His sin became a burden heavier than he could bear. He repented and confessed as best he knew how, but never believed that he was really pardoned. He was truly a wretched young man. He felt alone standing and looking up to heaven, but feeling utterly hopeless and unsaved.

Then in the spring of 1513 this monk's eyes were opened to the truth when he saw scripture as he had never seen it before. "But now," he read in Romans 3:21-22, "apart from law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe." And also when he read Galatians 3:11 he saw, "Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law; for 'the one who is righteous will live by faith.'" This is the key to our salvation, said Luther, we are saved by God's free gift of grace through faith, not by the works we perform as many and sincere as they may be.

This was like dynamite to the church of his day. It went straight to the heart of Ecclesiastical power and authority. It cut out the underpinnings of wealth, possessions, political and economic support and served to bring down and disarm those who ruled with dictatorial power and pronouncements. This courageous and fearless reformer had brought back and re-directed the church to its roots – the Gospel- the Good News of Jesus Christ. The prophet, Jeremiah in today's reading says it so beautifully, "But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after these days says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; then I will be their God, and they will be my people." Jer.31:33. The whole notion of doing endless good works to earn your way to heaven had been replaced by the truth of the Gospel message: we are saved by God's grace through faith.

There was a Sunday school teacher who wanted to teach her class about grace and faith. One day she asked them, "If I sold my house and my car and gave all my money to the church, would I get to heaven?" "No," all the children shouted. Again she asked, "If I cleaned the church every day, mowed the yard, and kept everything neat and tidy, would I get to heaven?" And again came a resounding, "No!" "Well," she continued, "then how can I get to heaven?" In the back of the room a five-year-old boy shouted out, "You gotta be dead!" Technically the boy was right. But we have to applaud his teacher's efforts to get her message across.

It is our Christian faith that is the essential thing. And our faith is not about what we can do for God, but what God has done for us. What Martin Luther saw in the spring of 1513 turned the world of religion on its head and I feel it was God's providence which made it happen and we should be eternally thankful for God has blessed us abundantly through his work. I am convinced that God directed Martin Luther to put it into proper perspective for us. Salvation, he said, is all about what God has done in Jesus Christ. Because he gave himself as a sacrifice for our sins, our debt to God is paid up. Just as Paul says in today's second reading, "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, who God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith." Rom.3:23-25

A student in a youth ministry class at Hannibal LaGrange College in Missouri had spent a lot of uninterrupted time studying hard for the final exam. When he went into class everyone was doing last minute cramming. The teacher presented the

material for the exam, and the student realized that there was some material he hadn't studied. When questioned, the teacher said this material was in the book and they were responsible for everything in the book. Although disappointed, the class couldn't argue.

When the test booklets were given out the professor instructed everyone to leave them face down until they were all distributed. When the students turned the exam booklets over, every answer was already filled in. At the bottom it said, "This is the end of the Final Exam. All the answers on your test are correct. You will receive an A on your final exam. The reason you passed the test is because the creator of the test took it for you. All the work you did in preparation for this test did not help you get the A. You have experienced grace."

The teacher then went around the room and asked each student, "What is your grade? Did you deserve the grade you are receiving? How much did all your studying for this exam help you achieve your final grade? The student said he had to fight back tears when answering the professor's questions and thinking about how his Creator, God, had passed the test for him.

We need to thank our God today for his grace. We need to thank him for our faith. And thank him for our salvation. **Amen.**

**Pastor Barney**