

October 29, 2023 - Reformation Sunday

Prayer of the Day

Almighty and gracious God, we thank you that your Holy Spirit renews the church in every age. Pour out your Holy Spirit on your holy people. Keep them steadfast in your word, protect and comfort them in times of trial, defend them against all enemies of the gospel, and bestow on your church your saving peace, through Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Hebrew Scriptures - Deuteronomy 34:1-12

(Verse 4) The LORD said to him, "This is the land of which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, saying, 'I will give it to your descendants'; I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not cross over there."

Psalms 90 - 1-8, 13-17

(Verse 16) Let your work be manifest to your servants, and your glorious power to their children.

Christian Scripture - 1st Thessalonians 2:1-8

(Verse 8) So deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you have become very dear to us.

Gospel Reading - Matthew 22:34-46

When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him.

"Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?"

He said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them this question:

"What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son is he?" They said to him, "The son of David." He said to them, "How is it then that David by the Spirit calls him Lord, saying, 'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet"'? If David thus calls him Lord, how can he be his son?"

No one was able to give him an answer, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.

Sermon

This is not a test! Just think of it as a pop quiz which won't be graded. ☺

Who can tell me what Jesus' first sermon was?

(On Sunday, some people said, "Let the children come to me." Some said, "Love your neighbour as yourself." And some said, "The sermon on the mount." These are all great answers, but none of them were the *first* sermon Jesus preached.)

Jesus' first sermon was, in fact, exactly the same sermon as the first sermon that was preached by his cousin, John the Baptist. "Repent, and believe the good news." From Matthew 4 and Mark 1.

The first word out of Jesus' mouth when he began his public ministry was, "Repent." And we've talked about the meaning of "Repent" before: Change!

Jesus insists that the Good News calls us to change: change behaviour, change the direction we are going, yes. But even *more*, the good news calls us to a change in outlook, a change in

perspective, a change in assumptions, a change in the way we think about faith, about ourselves, about God, about the church, about the world, about the mission to which we have been called.

The “change” that the call to “repent” demands of us is not like painting the wall of the living room a different colour! This change is radical, it’s all encompassing. It touches every aspect of every day, every thought, every encounter. It’s a big deal. And it’s a challenge.

This last week I read an article on a web page called “Pathos,” by a former pastor and now author, Karl Forehand. He told the story of an Episcopal Priest in the U.S. named Joseph Yoo (up here, Pastor Yoo would be called an Anglican!). Pastor Yoo was sitting in a Starbucks one day, minding his own business. He was wearing his clerical collar, so anyone who knew what that means would identify him as a member of the clergy.

As he was sitting there in Starbucks, a man approached him and introduced himself as a Christian, and immediately launched into a big long speech about how terrible it is that the church is so persecuted in the United States. When Pastor Joseph could finally get a word in edgewise, he asked a question which his new friend really didn’t want to hear.

Pastor Joseph simply asked, “What if Christianity is not under attack? What if it’s under review?”

The man stopped short, with a slightly shocked expression; paused for a second, mumbled something and walked away.

I think that’s a great question! It calls us to change how we look at our church, and our church’s situation in this society. And, quite obviously, that gentleman in the Starbucks was not willing to even consider the possibility of *examining*, let alone actually changing, his outlook.

And let’s not be too hard on him! Because we aren’t that different. Examining our perspectives, digging into our motivations, and doing so with any kind of authentic honesty, is no picnic. It’s hard work; it’s uncomfortable; it’s threatening. And it points us to the reality that we are not really in charge. Of *anything*, really!

Today is Reformation Sunday, perhaps Re-Formation Sunday. It’s a day in which we remember Martin Luther, John Calvin, Andreus Karstadt, and all the other reformers from the early 1500s who called for, and who struggled for, changes in the church of their day.

But we dare not pretend that no change happened before Martin Luther. We dare not pretend that all the changes that were necessary were completely accomplished back then. And we dare not pretend that the church of our day doesn’t need the same kind of housecleaning.

So, perhaps this year, we can approach Reformation Sunday as a day of repentance, of change; not only in behaviour, but in direction, in perspective, in outlook, in expectations. Perhaps we can try to start looking at ourselves as “under review,” a review which can lead to renewal.

It won’t be easy. It never is, because in order to make room for us to learn “the new,” we need to start by *un*-learning the old, the familiar, the safe. Reformation, re-formation, change(!), takes a whole lot of honesty, a whole lot of stumbling, a whole lot of letting go, a whole lot of confronting who we have been, and who we have *assumed* we are. And it very easily may make us feel that we are taking “one step forward and three steps back” most of the time.

And it will never be over.

Ans so, I expect that some of us will be like Moses, who received the promise of God, but could only see the fulfillment from a distance, and never “arrive” himself.

Some of us will be like those who came to Jesus with questions, and who find themselves asked other questions which they can’t answer. Maybe even in a Starbucks!

I suspect that many of us will be like the writer of today’s Psalm, who will pray that they will see the works of the Lord, both for themselves, and for the generations which come after them.

And some of us will be like St. Paul, who, in spite of challenges and heartache, find it within themselves to love the people around them.

And sometimes, we will be all of these, all at once.

And that's perfectly fine!

Because it's not a test. It's more of a pop-quiz which won't be graded. We're not going to fail this quiz, because **God** will not fail. God will go with us, and hold on to us, and direct us, and forgive us, and love us, and continue to send us to this messed up world, no matter **what** answer we might come up with.

Happy "Change" Sunday!

Prayers of the People

A - Trusting the presence of God with all creation, we offer our prayers for the world God loves, the church God calls, and for all people according to their needs.

[*Short pause*]

A - God of re-formation and renewal, change is hard. We crave the consistent, the predictable, the safe. Give us faith to look to you as we try to move forward. God who calls us,

C - Hear our prayer.

A - God of re-formation and renewal, change is happening. We see the signs in our news headlines, in our personal technologies, in our relationships, as well as in our church. Help us trust your presence in the middle of our upheavals. God who calls us,

C - Hear our prayer.

A - God of re-formation and renewal, change is coming. We sense that different times are approaching, but we have no idea of what they will look like, or how we will participate in these new realities. Send your Spirit to guide us, that we may follow faithfully. God who calls us,

C - Hear our prayer.

A - God of re-formation and renewal, you have called your church into a relationship with you. Remind us that this changes everything for us, and that your love and promise remain constant in the middle of **all** disruption. God who calls us,

C - Hear our prayer.

A - God of re-formation and renewal, change occurs which sometimes leads to unhealth. Fill us with compassion, that we may accompany those who suffer from illness, injustice, hunger, isolation and death, especially those we name before you.

[*Long pause*]

God who calls us,

C - Hear our prayer.

A - God of re-formation and renewal, re-form **us** to reflect a more faithful image of Jesus, so that the world around us may experience your loving presence, no matter how much change occurs. God who calls us,

C - Hear our prayer.

P - Into your hands we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

C - Amen.