

**Sermon on The Greatest Commandment**  
**October 25th, 2020- Reformation Sunday**  
**Vicar Jeanette Perrault**

Grace and peace to you on this day as we join together for worship.

Happy Reformation weekend everyone! I see many of you wearing your red to celebrate this day. For a long time, I had no idea why the heck people wore red this day, but I learned that red is the church's liturgical color to represent the power and the work and the fire of the Holy Spirit. And so, for Reformation Sunday weekend, we remember the Holy Spirit and celebrate its continuous, reforming work.

Now during our Following Jesus Together discussion this week, I asked those present what they knew about the Reformation. This wasn't by any means a test, but more just to see what we knew. Someone said "it was a split between the catholic and protestant church," someone also said "indulgences" and "the diet of worms," and of course someone said "Martin Luther." Those were all answers that add up into the history of the Reformation. So today I'm going to give a quick crash course on the history of the Reformation.

So there was a man, Martin Luther, who was interested in philosophy and theology. In 1505 he was walking down the road and lightning struck next to him, and he cried out asking for help, pledging his life to being a monk. So off he went, joining a monastic order in the Roman Catholic church. Over his time, though, he noticed the priests, those in charge, were charging people money for indulgences, saying that if they paid a certain amount their specific sins would be forgiven and their salvation would be paid towards. Luther disagreed with these actions, so on October 31<sup>st</sup>, 1517, Martin Luther nailed 95 theses to the church door, which acted as a bulletin board at that time, with his disagreements against how the church was conducting themselves and the power they were holding. Amongst many things, at the core he believed that salvation was given from God by one's faith alone.

Whether he meant it or not, his writings spread throughout the region. People were reading and hearing about how the church was being conducted may be wrong and corrupt. And those in charge were obviously not too happy with Luther. So about four years later, at the diet of Worms, which is the name of the town, Martin Luther did not take back what he wrote and he was excommunicated and determined an outlaw. He fled to Wartburg Castle where he stayed and hid, and he wrote. He translated the New Testament from Greek and Latin to German, expanding the reach of the Word of God beyond those who could speak Latin, particularly those in charge in the church.

Now that the New Testament was available for more people to read, digest, and interpret, people started to argue with one another over it. They weren't being told anymore what to believe, but made their own conclusions. Because of that, there came a split of people away from the Roman Catholic Church, which is where Protestants came from, and us as Lutherans came from today.

This was just a brief overview, but obviously this was a huge deal for the church because we continue to celebrate the Reformation today. And it was because one man, Martin Luther, decided to

respond to something he believed was going against the free and generous love of God. He used his actions and words to speak up and stand up for those who couldn't. He didn't stop, but instead he was motivated by this desire to make sure people knew that they were loved by God without any strings attached.

I find it ironically wonderful that the Gospel today, this Reformation weekend, is what is called the Greatest Commandment. Jesus is challenged again by someone, asking which commandment in the law is the greatest? Which one should be followed above all? And Jesus responds with this- "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. And the second is this- You shall love your neighbor as yourself." These commandments are not words that Jesus just made up. They are laws in the Old Testament, but together they capture everything we are to do and how we are to live our lives. We are to love God with our whole selves- our hearts and souls and minds, and I would say our physical selves too. And Jesus doesn't stop there. He reminds those gathered that we are to love our neighbors, the same way we love ourselves.

We cannot love God without loving our neighbor. We can't have one without the other. Having faith in God is equal to loving God. And loving God is equal to loving our neighbors. So in order to show and have faith in God, it is necessary to love our neighbors. Jesus states it in the Scripture today, and we trust that every person we meet is made in the image of God and has Christ within them. Even, and especially those, we may not agree with, who make us frustrated, and those who have hurt us.

Sometimes I find myself thinking about the Reformation and how desperately we need some reform and change in this world right now. Or maybe we just need some more love, love that unifies instead of divides, love that stands up for justice instead of hides in fear, love that speaks out against evil actions and words against our neighbors and those in need instead of letting them be. Sometimes I think where is our Martin Luther? When will this change and reform and love take place in our world today?

But what if change is happening right here and right now, even when it's hard to believe? What if our world is being reformed and transformed right under our noses and right before our eyes? I'm guessing Martin Luther, when he was nailing his 95 theses to the door, didn't think how impactful his actions and words would be. Words that proclaimed God's love for all, and actions that reflected loving neighbors and loving God with his whole self.

If that's the case, we are part of the continuous reforming of our world. We are being guided by the power of the Holy Spirit, filled with Christ's love, and sent out in God's creation to love our neighbors and in turn, love God. The celebration of the Reformation isn't just a time to wear red and celebrate what happened 500 some years ago, but it's a reminder to us the power of trusting in God, following in Christ's love, and loving our neighbors in all that we are and in all that we do. And we are called to do this knowing that God first loves us, that Christ died on the cross for you. It's a love that transforms us, reforms us, and sends us. May you feel this love as you go about your days, in all that you say and in all that you do. Amen.