

29 October 2006
The Festival of the Reformation

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“The Real Reformation”

Text: Jeremiah 31:31-34; Romans 3:19-28; John 8:31-36

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today, we celebrate the Festival of the Reformation, which, when you think about it, is a festival that celebrates *one man*.

A man who was able to accomplish great things.

A man who didn't care so much if he was politically correct or not.

A man who taught unlike the teachers who came before him.

A man who was single-minded and focused on his mission.

A man who was arrested for his teaching.

A man who was hated by many, and had even friends turn on him.

A man whose life still impacts you and me today.

And that man was *Jesus Christ*.

Oh, I'm sorry! Did you think I was talking about Luther?

Don't get me wrong! I thank God for Luther, and what God was able to accomplish through him. And he was certainly a central figure in the Reformation.

But it's not about him.

What Luther did (as one preacher put it) was “sweep the cobwebs off the crucifix,” and once again proclaim Christ and Him crucified.

He restored the Gospel to its rightful place in the Church's proclamation.

Because sometimes, as hard as it is to believe (!), the Church gets off track.

And we need to get called back to why we're here, and what we're to be about.

Christ and Him crucified.

And so the Reformation is about an historical event, yes – but *not* the one that happened nearly 500 years ago, but the one that happened some 2,000 years ago.

Not at Wittenberg, but on Calvary.

The nails pounded through the 95 Theses and into the wooden doors of the Castle Church in Wittenberg were important.

But the nails pounded through the flesh and bone of Jesus and into the wood of the cross, even moreso.

For it is through the cross where true reformation takes place.
The reformation of the heart, as the Spirit sent by Jesus turns us sinners into saints, and re-forms us into the image of Christ.

And just as the people in Jeremiah's day, and the people in Jesus' day, and the people in Luther's day, we need **re**-forming.
Because sin is constantly **de**-forming us.
Because we are constantly being **con**-formed to the ways of the world, and **in**-formed by what is not truth.
And so we always need **re**-forming.
By the Word of God.
As individuals, and as a church.
Modernism, secularism, pietism, rationalism, popularism, institutionalism, and all kinds of other “-isms” seduce us away from Christ crucified, and to put our trust and our hearts in something else.
Perhaps even Lutheran-ism, if we become like the Jews in Jesus' day, and think: “*We are offspring of Luther and have never been enslaved to anyone . . .*”

Now again, don't get me wrong! I thank God for Luther, and I am proud to belong to the confession of faith that is called Lutheran.
But it's time that we asked a very Lutheran question about being Lutheran: *What does this mean?*
Does being Lutheran mean following Luther?
Does being Lutheran mean *not* being Roman Catholic?
Sadly, that is what many think.
But rather, I think, to be Lutheran simply means this: *to be sinners re-formed by Christ crucified.*
Not re-formed by me, or what I am able to do in my life.
Not re-formed by my own reason or strength. (Explanation of the 3rd Article of the Apostles Creed)
And not re-formed by what I feel in my heart.
But re-formed by Christ crucified.

And so to be Lutheran means that the cross is not just an historical moment in time, but a *present* reality.
Re-forming us, re-forming His Church, even today.
It means that Holy Baptism is not what we do, but is a washing away of sin because through the water and the Word, we are joined to **Christ crucified**. (Romans 6)
It means that the preaching of the Gospel is not just information, or instruction, or how to live a better life, but is the power of God (Romans 1:16) because it writes **Christ crucified** on our hearts. (OT reading from Jeremiah 31)

It means that Holy Communion is not just a meal, but is the body and blood of **Christ crucified**, given to us to eat and to drink, to give us His forgiveness, life, and salvation.

And if we are joined with Christ in His crucifixion, then we are also raised with Christ Re-formed into His image.

To live a new life.

That we be no longer **de**-formed by sin, **con**-formed to the world, or **in**-formed by what is not truth – but **re**-formed into Christ.

Christ crucified.

And so to be Lutheran also means taking **Christ crucified** into the world. Wherever God has placed you, whatever you have been given to do, surrounded by whomever.

To live, as Jesus said, as one set free by the Son. (John 8)

Perfectly free.

Which means that we are at one and the same time *perfectly free in faith and so subject to none, and perfectly free in love and so subject to all.* (Luther, *On the Freedom of a Christian*)

Using our freedom not as license, but in love.

Serving, giving, forgiving.

Laying down our lives, just as Christ has done for us.

Many do not want such a life, or such a God.

Preferring a God who is instead strong and mighty, not weak and crucified. And preferring a life for us the same.

The fiction Satan would have us believe is that those are opposites. That you cannot be both strong and weak, both mighty and crucified. And so you must choose.

But the truth that Christ crucified shows us is that these are not opposites!

And that God was no where so strong as He was on the cross.

That His power is made perfect is weakness.

That the Almighty God became the Son of Man, because I am a son of man.

He took flesh because I am flesh.

Born under the Law because I am under the Law. (Galatians 4)

And bore my sin on the cross.

Dying, that I might live.

Captive, to set me free.

To be Lutheran means that I cannot live without this Christ.
Christ crucified.

I cannot truly live here and now, and I cannot live eternally.

Life apart from Christ here and now is but an imitation life.

Earth can never be Paradise.

But Christ crucified, Christ arisen, and Christ ascended means that I too have arisen and ascended.

Not in the future, but already now.

That I am forgiven, now.

Reconciled to God, now.

At peace, now.

And no terrorists, disappointments, unfulfilled dreams, economic ruin, grief, or sickness can take that away!

Or as Luther put it: *“And take they our life, goods, fame, child, and wife, though these all be gone, Our victory has been won; The Kingdom ours remaineth.”* (LW #298 v.4)

Have we gotten off message?

Too concerned with sound bites, popularity, and growth?

As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, I guess.

We always need re-forming.

We always need Christ crucified.

Not once, but always.

And so in the end, we are Lutherans for the same reason we are Christians: by grace through faith in Christ crucified.

The Reformation is all about one man.

Thanks be to God!

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.