

## **Pastor Roy's sermon from October 27, 2013**

Reformation Sunday is a remembrance. It is not a celebration, but a remembering of a difficult time of separation between churches. One thousand years into the church's story, there was a separation between the Eastern Greek Church and the Western Roman Church. The pope and the Patriarch mutually excommunicated one another. Neither leader wanted to submit to the other. The church was fully entrenched in power politics. The church was faithful in many ways, in that time, but in their ego centered leadership, they were far from their Lord. This has always been a struggle in the institutional church. Servant leadership does not come easy to us.

In the 1500's Martin Luther fully expected his call for reform to be accepted and embraced by the leadership of the church. He too was excommunicated. There were poor practices in the Roman church at the time, but their primary problem was mistrust and many assumptions. Brother Martin came to assume the very worst of the pope and the hierarchy of the church. They certainly mistrusted his intentions and theological foundation. And they had become very comfortable with their practices and the fact that they had the power to do this and so, and they wanted to keep it that way. Power politics.

In the late 1700s, the Anglican Church faced a similar problem. The sect led by John Wesley known as Methodists was put out of the mother church. Neither reformer wanted to be apart from the church he wished to reform. Both reformers called the church back to Grace. Both reformers were tormented by their unworthiness to receive mercy. You could say the same of the Apostle Paul.

It's true of all of us. We all know ourselves better than anyone else. We know we are unworthy. We know we are often confused, weary, doubtful, slow to forgive, quick to blame and to judge, proud, defensive. We love when it is somehow good for us. We are broken people—even on a good day.

So there is plenty of room for us to receive grace. The center of the Reformation is grace. At times we Lutherans have not embraced the grace of the reformation. We have held the Roman Church at an arm's length. We have competed with other protestant and Lutheran churches. We aren't even sure what to do with the Orthodox churches. These days we are challenge to think about how we relate to Muslims and Buddhists and other faith communities. Do we try to convert them? Do we learn from them? Do we learn how we are similar and how we are different? Do we love regardless...or fear those who are different from us.

Today, Reformation Sunday, as Lutherans call it, we recognize that we must always be about the work of being reformed in Grace. We cannot grow comfortable with the way things are even though we rarely like change. The Spirit calls. We listen. We listen for creative ways to live out the gospel of peace—to care. Not as we should or ought, but as we feel drawn to care. We welcome as God has welcomed us. We listen as God listens to us. We are present as God is present.

Martin Luther, John Wesley and many other reformers, prophets and teachers have called the church to learn, and pray, and love neighbor in the ways God has gifted each of us. We can all choose to live as Christ lived, died, and was raised to life. The love of God is written upon our souls. This truth, this trust in the one who gives us life, this faith in love sets us free to follow the call of the Spirit: Love written on our hearts.

The church is a reforming church. We need to be formed in faith, in love, in grace. This week, this season let us dwell upon freedom. Think about grace and how it sets us free to live together in love and mercy.