

Pastor Roy's Sermon from October 28, 2018 (Reformation Sunday)

Today is reformation Sunday and on this Sunday every year we recall that the church is constantly reforming. There has never been a time nor will there ever be a time when the church does not need to listen for the Spirit inviting it to humble itself and open itself to listen for God's call in new faithful directions. We as congregations and denominations repent of our failure to love those who seem just too different, too needy, too untrustworthy, or too sinful to welcome. Jesus welcomed all who were hungry for the love of God. He made the respectable people feel very uncomfortable even as he made the hungry people feel loved, noticed for perhaps the first time in their lives. This is the good news. Those who are hungry are fed by the mercy of God, day by day. True confession, whatever we have to confess, gets us in touch with the love of Jesus.

Martin Luther, imperfect child of God that he was, welcomed peasants who had felt valued only for their meager contributions to the Church. He welcomed them by giving them the Bible in their own language. He welcomed them by teaching them about the grace of God revealed in Jesus Christ. Pure love. Pure grace. Pure freedom. As he renewed the church with a fresh welcome, many respectable church leaders felt very uncomfortable. They worried that welcoming the masses would defile the church. They had forgotten that Jesus loved those who felt worthless, those who had given up on their own self value. They were trapped because they were out of touch with Jesus' love—their complicated rules and traditions made love just beyond anyone's reach.

Two thousand years before Luther, Jeremiah, the Jewish prophet, is calling the Jews back to God. Jeremiah dreams of a time when everyone will personally know God. The people of Jeremiah and Luther's day are pretty much the same. Peasants felt hopelessly removed from God and were not welcomed in synagogue or church, those with land and wealth felt nothing but a social concern for the abundant love of God. It's hard to trust God deeply when one's trust is in other things.

Perhaps this is why the Psalmist invites all to find God both as refuge and strength. To find God in rest and stillness. The Good News is that all people can know God because God is present to be known to those who still themselves and listen. It's quite simple. Sometimes our theology makes stillness complicated. Regardless, Jesus is still calling us, as Jeremiah, as Luther—to be still and rest in God's abundant, unconditional love.

Paul preaches Jesus as the ultimate message of God's grace and mercy. Nothing else matters for Paul. He believes in forgiveness of sins and the love of God because he has found these in Jesus like he never found them in the law and traditions. The meaning of his life is summed up in following Jesus and serving as Jesus served and loved.

Then John comes along after Paul and reminds his congregation that Jesus' word, Jesus' Way reveals the truth which sets us free. To know the love and life of Jesus is to be set free. You will know the truth and the truth will set you free. The truth is the unconditional love of God and invitation to live in that love. For Christians our savior in love is Jesus Christ.

Where is Jesus today? How is Jesus calling the church to love with abandon, to welcome those who despair? How is Jesus calling us to give up our mad attempts to be respectable in our own eyes, to be comfortable, to follow the shortcuts others have paved to God?

Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations; I will be exalted in the earth.

Thanks be to God for this unending love which gives us life and sets us free. Amen.