



“The Reformation: Who Needs It?”

Jude 1-3, 20-25

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Reformation Day

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Today is **Reformation Day**. Please don't yawn. I know that many people have grown tired of talking about the Reformation. Many churches just breeze past it. In most *ELCA* congregations, the Reformation isn't even observed. It's no wonder, really. Many people simply see Reformation as that one day each year when we get to officially bash the *Roman Catholic Church* -- the one day each year when Lutheran preachers stand in their pulpits and gleefully point out and condemn the errors of others. Is it any wonder, then, that a lot of people ask themselves: “**The Reformation: Who needs it?**”

But, you know, Martin Luther didn't set out to badmouth or reform someone else's church. In fact, the initial reformation didn't take place in a church at all, but in a heart -- one heart -- Luther's heart. Only after he was transformed and reformed by the Gospel, did he set out to reform the church -- but not someone else's church -- his own church.

That's what the Reformation is all about. Who needs reformation? I do, in my own heart. So do you. Then, and only then, can we seek reformation in our church. Let's not point fingers today at the *Roman Catholic Church* or any other church. After all, we aren't responsible for their errors and, besides, how naive and arrogant to think we can reform churches we aren't even a part of. No, today we pray for God's reformation in our hearts and in *our* church: *The Lutheran Church -- Missouri Synod*.

But before we can reform our church from its errors, we must have our own hearts reformed. Before Martin Luther could address the sins rampant in his church, *the Holy Mother Church of Rome*, he had to address his own sin. God wrote in His Word, “Be perfect, as I the Lord, your God, am perfect” (Leviticus 19:2). Luther heard those words and shuddered. He grew up in a church that taught that people are saved by their own efforts. Luther believed that and it drove him to despair. He saw the hypocrisy of thinking we can stand before the throne of a holy God, clothed in the rags of self-made goodness, and think that God can't see our sin. He saw the evil of believing in a God who could be bought and bribed, a God who crucified His own Son so that He might eternally rub our noses in it, and who used His Son's death as justification to roast us in hell unless we kept the penance and payments coming.

But sin and hypocrisy didn't die with Luther, did they? There's enough of that in our hearts to last a thousand lifetimes. Who among us hasn't done a good deed motivated by the hope that God will see it and reward us? Who among us hasn't spent sleepless nights convinced that one day we must bleed for our sins? Who among us has

not, at times, viewed God as an insatiable ogre and the next day as a benign, senile, excuse-accepting buddy?

But in the midst of our sin and hypocrisy Christ comes to us. It is to us, arrogant and self-righteous, that the Word comes and declares, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9). It is to us, drenched with the sweat of fear and guilt, that God’s Word comes and declares, “This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:22-24).

When Martin Luther finally read the precious Gospel of God’s love for us in Jesus Christ, he was changed. *Re-formed*. From unbelief to faith. From despair to joyous confidence. From death to life. He would later write, “*It was as if the gates of heaven themselves were opened.*” We are not saved by our works or efforts. We are saved by God’s grace alone, through faith in Jesus Christ alone. He has done it all!

We’ve learned this same truth that Luther learned. By God’s grace, through the faith worked in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, we too have been reformed. In the water of Baptism God took us from death to new life. In the teaching we received from pious parents, loving teachers, and dedicated pastors we grew in faith and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. In the mystery of absolution we, who confess our sin and unworthiness, hear the voice of Jesus as He borrows the vocal chords of His called ministers to announce to us that our sins are forgiven. In the Lord’s Supper we are nourished with same body and blood that our He gave and shed for us on the cross. These gifts are too precious to compromise, for these gifts have transformed us from frightened sinners struggling to please an angry Judge into confident and grateful children of a loving heavenly Father. This is the heart and the core of it all.

So now we look to the reformation of our church. Our church? But we’re Lutherans! We’re the ones who have it right! Yes, by God’s grace, there is much that is right. We have our heritage. We stand firm in the truth of justification by grace through faith. We have the pure Gospel and the right administration of Christ’s priceless Sacraments.

But we also have sin and hypocrisy and a spirit in our synod ready to yield the truth of the Gospel. We have a synod that has lost it’s mooring, that’s eager to compromise God’s Word to be a more popular player on the world stage. We have church leaders who say that the *Muslim* idol *Allah* is also the true God and other leaders who defend them. We have mechanisms now in place poised to turn our church from one where your voice is counted into one where decisions are made by a *Synodical President* who has become a pope and *District Presidents* who have become bishops answerable only to him. We have a church mired in dozens of other problems, all brought on by the fact that, while she may officially declare the truth of God’s Word, in practice she’s

afraid to follow it and defend it. It is official, my friends, *The Lutheran Church -- Missouri Synod* is no longer orthodox.

Martin Luther's personal reformation of heart compelled him to share the gift of God's truth with the church in his day. For this he was rejected and threatened by an apostate and heterodox church -- his own. Yet he could do nothing else than speak the truth of God's Word to which his heart was captive. He learned that the comfort and peace afforded by "belonging" to a church meant nothing if that church had no stomach for the truth.

I dearly love our *Lutheran Church -- Missouri Synod*. I have been her dutiful child all my life. She's my spiritual mother. But she's very sick. We're captive to the same life-giving truth that bound Luther's heart. We also must speak boldly for the truth of the Gospel that transforms and reforms. In the months ahead I will inform you and lead you, but you must be ready to stand and speak. Laypeople, not pastors, are the Lord's instruments now. Please know that we may be threatened and even rejected. In the words of St. Jude, "I urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints" (Jude 3). By God's grace the never-ending reformation will continue. We need it. Our synod needs it. May the Lord have mercy on us. Amen.

May the peace of God that passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria!