

Reformation Sunday  
October 29, 2023

Prelude

\*Call to Worship

Psalm 46:1-3, 8-11

God is our refuge and strength  
a very present help in trouble.

**Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change,  
though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;  
though its waters roar and foam,  
though the mountains tremble with its tumult.**

Come, behold the works of the Lord;  
see what desolations he has brought on the earth.  
He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;  
he breaks the bow and shatters the spear;  
he burns the shields with fire.

**The Holy One says,**

**“Be still and know that I am God!**

**I am exalted among the nations,  
I am exalted in the earth.”**

The Lord of hosts is with us;  
**the God of Jacob is our refuge.**

\*Hymn 275      A Mighty Fortress Is Our God

Prayer of Confession

**Almighty God,**

**We confess that we have taken your commandments and turned them into rules.**

**We have criticized those who have fallen short  
and selfishly proclaimed ourselves righteous.**

**We have failed to understand the spirit of the commandments  
and the way you showed us to live-  
loving God and loving neighbors.**

**Forgive us for turning your law into burdens  
and ignoring the glorious freedom from sin, gained by the  
saving death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

Hymn 698  
Assurance of Grace

Take, O Take Me As I Am  
1 John 4:16

God is love.

Those who abide in love, abide in God,  
and God abides in them.

Friends, believe the good news of the gospel.  
Know you are forgiven and be at peace.

### Time With Our Young Disciples

#### Scripture Readings

Romans 1:17; Ephesians 2:8; 1 Peter 2:5; 2 Timothy 3:18; Matthew 11:29-30

#### The Morning Message

This is a special day in the life of those churches who trace their history to the Protestant Reformation. That includes us and our Lutheran and Reformed brothers and sisters. Other Protestants acknowledge Reformation Sunday for the contributions the Reformed Movement made in the life of the Christian Church, and even influenced their own denominations.

Presbyterians trace their history to the 16th century and the Protestant Reformation. Our heritage, and much of what we believe, comes from the faith and writings of John Calvin, whose first vocation was the practice of law in France.

Calvin did much of his writing from Geneva, Switzerland. From there, the Reformed movement spread to other parts of Europe and the British Isles. This new movement gave great consideration to which form of government would be most effective for the church. Some thought the church should be governed by bishops and became the Episcopalian Party. Some believed the church should be governed by elders, and became the Presbyterian Party. Still others believed government should be conducted directly by the congregation, and they became the Congregationalist Party.

The name Presbyterian comes from the Greek word, presbuteros, which means “elder.” It is used 72 times in the New Testament in reference to church leadership. Presbyterian Church government emphasizes that the leadership of the church is to be shared between pastor and session, what we also call Teaching Elders and Ruling Elders. Our strong emphasis on church government is our heritage from John Knox and the Scottish Presbyterians. I’m wearing tartan plaid today in their honor.

Many of the early Presbyterians in America came from England, Scotland, and Ireland. The first American Presbytery was organized at Philadelphia in 1706. The first General Assembly was

held in Philadelphia in 1789. The first GA was convened by the Rev. John Witherspoon, the only minister to sign the Declaration of Independence.

The Presbyterian Church is distinctly confessional and connectional. I always like to say you can't be anonymous in the Presbyterian Church. We are family. We believe the faith that unites us is always stronger than disputes that divide us, though I have witnessed some dangerously close calls.

So what is unique about the Presbyterian Church?

We are distinctive in two major ways: we adhere to a pattern of religious thought known as Reformed Theology and we practice the representative form of government that values both ministers and members.

What is Reformed theology?

The Shorter Catechism, that many of us learned as children, says that our chief end, or primary goal in life, is to "know, or glorify, God and enjoy God forever." Theology is a way of thinking about God and how God relates to the world God made.

We affirm the holiness of the One who creates, sustains, rules and redeems the world out of love and grace. I think we see this clearly in our Sacrament of Baptism, especially infant baptism. That's a topic that deserves a much more detailed discussion, but, here's what I want to lift up for today: When parents present their child, the evidence of their love, for baptism, they affirm their belief and reliance on Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. They claim the promises of the Christian faith for their child until he or she can learn and accept them as their own. By the work of the Holy Spirit, that child is washed in the waters of baptism, received into the family of faith, marked and sealed as Christ's own forever. He or she is surrounded by love and supported in prayer, disciplined and guided, not with threats about the wages of sin, but, in ways that echo with notes of grace, love, forgiveness, acceptance, and with an eye toward the wellbeing of all God's children.

Some of the principles articulated by John Calvin are still at the core of Presbyterian beliefs. Among these are the sovereignty of God, the authority of Scripture, justification by grace through faith, and the priesthood of all believers.

These are all good features of the faith we express as Presbyterians. John Calvin, Martin Luther, Jan Hus, Zwingli, Knox, and others, have given us a foundation upon which we can advance the Kingdom as we are called.

Calvin insisted that the Holy Spirit continues to work in both individuals and institutions, transforming us, sanctifying us, and conforming us to the image of Jesus Christ. The church, Calvin explains, is also in the process of changing. It is “Reformed and always reforming, according to the Word of God.”

If we take a look around this sanctuary, we see evidence of Calvin’s influence. He believed that the congregation is the main choir in worship and the choir performs a supporting role. Which is why, when this sanctuary was constructed, the choir loft was built behind the congregation.

There are three pieces of furniture which remain in the sanctuary for all services, though we’ve been known to allow them to be moved to accommodate special occasions in worship. The baptismal font, which is positioned close to a door from which the congregation enters, symbolizing our entrance into the family of faith. The Communion Table, to symbolize the life, death, and resurrection of our Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ, and to be filled with his love and grace. And to recognize our communion with all believers over time and space. The pulpit, from which God’s Word is read and proclaimed. This was a high priority of the Reformation: to make the Scriptures accessible to the people in the language they understand and use.

Because this idea that the church is reformed and always reforming, we embrace the fellowship of other Christian denominations in specific ways. Today, we are called a “Formula of Agreement Church,” which joins us to the Disciples of Christ, the United Church of Christ, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and the Reformed Church in America. We can and have in the Presbytery of West Virginia, approved ministers ordained in these denominations to pastor our churches and administer the sacraments.

We are so similar in liturgy that if we were to open a Presbyterian Book of Common Worship, the Lutheran Book of Worship, and the Episcopal Book of Common Prayer, we would find nearly identical language and movements in worship. The Episcopal Church in America is not a Formula of Agreement Church, but we are very similar in theology and practice.

Friends, the Word of God is living and active in the world, making all things new, in and through Jesus Christ. We are being ever-transformed by this Word. As we consider the challenges of every day life in the United States, we may think there is no hope of ending violence, or poverty, or racism, or lawlessness, or any other obstacle to peace and human progress. But our faith teaches us otherwise. Did Jesus not feed a couple thousand people with a little boy’s lunch, heal a man so mentally ill that his family banished him to live in the town graveyard? Did not Jesus raise a twelve year old girl from the dead? Did he not go to the cross, dying in our place, that we might live?

Yes, our needs, the worlds' needs, are staggering. This is the Good news: God isn't finished with us yet.

“Soli Deo Gloria.” To God alone be the glory.

\*Hymn 630                      Fairest Lord Jesus, verses 1 and 2

\*Affirmation of Faith      The Apostles' Creed p. 35

Sharing Our Joys and Concerns

Pastoral Prayer and the Lord's Prayer

Presenting Our Tithes and Offerings

Offertory

\*Hymn Doxology

\*Prayer of Dedication

**We give Thee but Thine own,**

**whatever the gift may be.**

**All that we have is Thine alone,**

**a trust, O Lord, from Thee. Amen.**

\*Hymn 360    Fairest Lord Jesus, verses 3 and 4

\*Blessing

For all that God can do within us,

for all that God can do without us.

**Thanks be to God!**

For all in whom Christ lived before us,

for all in whom Christ lives beside us.

**Thanks be to God!**

For all the Spirit wants to bring us,

for where the Spirit wants to send us.

**Thanks be to God!**

The blessing of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,

be with you today and always. **Amen.**

\*Postlude