

Worship for October 27, 2024
Reformation Sunday

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 Take, O Take Me As I Am
Assurance of Grace 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.

First Reading Psalm 46
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 Presbyterian and Reformed Churches. It is Reformation Day. Some churches may celebrate this day with a traditional “Kirkin’ of the Tartans,” or parade of tartans, or colors, in the church, by which each Scottish clan is identified. This is a nod to our Scottish history and a fun way to remember our forebears in the faith. I don’t own a tartan, although there is a good Scottish presence in my family. So, I might just enjoy some tea and shortbread.

Until the Renaissance of the 15th century, the authority of the Roman Catholic Church remained largely unquestioned in Western Europe. The invention of the printing press in Germany around 1440 made it possible for common people to have access to printed materials including the Bible. At this time in history, the language of the church was Latin, an academic language, and unknown to the general public. The ability to read the Bible in one’s own language enabled many to discover religious thinkers who had begun to question the authority of the church. Martin Luther was one such person. He was a German priest and professor. Luther started the movement known as the Protestant Reformation.

In 1517, Luther posted his list of 95 theses – grievances against the Roman Catholic Church- on a church door in Wittenburg, Germany. Some twenty years later, a French-Swiss lawyer and theologian, John Calvin, further refined the Reformers’ way of thinking about the nature of God and God’s relationship with humanity in what came to be known as Reformed theology. John Knox, a Scotsman who studied with Calvin in Geneva, took Calvin’s writings back to Scotland. Other Reformed communities developed in England, Holland, and France. And we shouldn’t leave out the Waldensians of Italy in this movement toward a Protestant way of life and faith.

Important to the Reformers are what became known as the Five Solas, or Solae. These ideas shaped the doctrine of the early Protestant churches.

The five solas are:

Sola Scriptura. "Scripture alone."

Sola fide. "Faith alone."

Sola gratia. "Grace alone."

Solus Christus. "Through Christ alone."

Soli Deo Gloria. "Glory to God alone."

That little word, "alone," set Reformed theology apart from Roman Catholicism. Reformers held that authority in the church came via sola Scriptura, or, Scripture alone. Rejected were the elements of tradition and experience, to which the Roman Church adhered. Reformers held that we are saved by faith alone that comes through the grace of God alone. Good works were not efficacious to our salvation. Reformers taught that Jesus Christ is the only mediator between human beings and God. Rejected were any other mediators- saints, the Virgin Mary, priests. And that our salvation is won for us, by God, through the saving death of God's Son, Jesus, and not due to any merit on our part.

The result, at least in Presbyterian circles, was to reject or eliminate what some Reformers believed were unnecessary or ostentatious accoutrements of the church. Protestant worship could seem austere. Gone were the icons, incense and bells, and the Mass from every service of worship. Only two Sacraments were acknowledged: Baptism and Communion, because these were the Sacraments Jesus instituted. Calvin taught that the congregation was the primary choir for worship and so the choir went to the back of the congregation. The original choir loft at Kuhn was located in the back, what we now call the balcony. It was Calvinistic in its placement.

A lot has changed in the world and in the church in the last five hundred years. I'm writing this message on Wednesday afternoon in my kitchen. Just looking around the room I see a refrigerator that keeps our milk and eggs cold; I see a television that keeps me up-to-date with a twenty-four-seven news feed; a tea kettle, a crock pot, a toaster, and a stove which eliminate the need to keep a fire going in the backyard. I am working from a laptop computer on which I compose sermons and newsletter articles and committee reports. It also connects me to the session and my grandchildren in North Carolina. On it, I can chat with friends all over the world. I shop on-line. It is safe and convenient. Twenty years into the 21st century, it seems progress leads us to limitless possibilities. And that's just the view from the kitchen in an average home.

We have made huge social advancements: on Thursday I drove to Milton City Hall and voted in the US General Election. Maybe you have voted early, too, or by absentee ballot. Maybe you will exercise your right to vote on Election Day, November 5. It is important. We are participants in democracy. You have probably heard me say that we take our citizenship too lightly. I urge

you to re-think that. We enjoy tremendous blessings in this country and I pray we continue if we want to sustain our democracy.

What are some other steps forward since the Reformation? Probably the greatest change is that I am speaking to you as an ordained Minister of Word and Sacrament. Ordination for women in the Presbyterian Church was not adopted until the latter half of the 20th century. It took me eight years to earn my Master of Divinity Degree. It was an additional five years before I was ordained because my seminary did not offer Hebrew. Hebrew proficiency is a requirement for ordination in the pcusa. God made a way for me to study Hebrew and I am grateful for that gift.

And the icing on the cake, for me, was that early in my ordained service, I was elected Moderator of the Presbytery of West Virginia.

All unheard of in any earlier era.

The Canon of Scripture was closed in the 4th century. But the traditions and practices of the Church have changed due to culture and necessity. The Church is a dynamic living organism. It has grown and gained prominence. It has failed and suffered losses in adherents and reputation. While the Church has sometimes failed to act, it has typically rushed to the side of the suffering, even at the peril of losing its own life.

The result is we have a more global orientation. Our children are in school with children of other faiths, cultures, and languages. We find meaning and value in meeting our neighbors of other faiths and even with those who claim to have no faith. Learning what is important to our neighbors and friends is important to us. Often we discover that we share common understandings of the Holy One who created the world and every man, woman, girl and boy who lives upon it. Our common understandings and our shared challenges, even our common tragedies, increase our capacity for compassion, lead us to better trust one another, and to work toward those things we all hold dear, like peace and freedom.

In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul writes these words about the church, the body of Christ:

“For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit...If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.”

One of the great realities of the New Testament church was that it was diverse. Sometimes diversity led to conflicts, as was true in Corinth. But Paul viewed diversity as a tremendous gift. To Paul, the church was stronger when the God-given gifts are shared to build up the church and strengthen its ministry.

In our *Book of Order* we read, “Christ calls the church into being, giving it all that is necessary...Christ alone rules, calls, teaches, and uses the church as he wills. Each member of the body of Christ is given a manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”

Our mission in the world is the ministry of Christ. Just as Christ was called to bring good news to the poor...to proclaim release to the captives and ...to let the oppressed go free, this is our call, as attested in Luke 4:8.

A motto of the Presbyterian Church (USA) is “The Church reformed, and always reforming.” We would add these words, “ According to the Word of God and the call of the Spirit. (*Book of Order.*)

So it is no surprise, that as opportunities, controversies, and problems occur in the life of the world, the Church and her people will engage it, struggle with it, and faithfully discern how God is leading the church to speak and act.

We have not shied away from such topics as abortion, genetic engineering, divorce, sexuality, the role of women in the church, war, ecology, economy, health care, public policy, criminal justice, and more. They are all works in progress. The more we learn, the more we understand, the better we respond and adapt. I am confident that issues we’ve never dreamed of will emerge in the future to command the faith and practice of those who follow us.

And confident of all these things, I offer these words attributed to Paul:

“For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Romans 8:38-39.

May it be so for all of us.

*Hymn 630 Fairest Lord Jesus

*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 643 Now Thank We All Our God

*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