

This is Reformation Sunday. One of the theological insights we celebrate is our freedom in the gospel. As Jesus says, “if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.” Freedom from an angry God who would judge us according to our sin.

And this is personal for me... As someone who grew up thinking God was going to judge me by how sinful I was, this is a huge weight off my shoulders.

I have memories of hearing the confession and forgiveness, and letting myself believe it. Freedom indeed! This is the core of the Gospel, the good news of Jesus... This is Paul’s primary insight in the epistle of Romans, and this is Luther’s back to the basic’s insight on Justification by Grace through Faith...

By grace you have been saved... Your sins are forgiven! God doesn’t love if you are good, God loves you because God is good, and God has promised to forgive all your sins.

What I’d like to do this morning is spend a little time reflecting about history and humanity. Especially in light of the reformation. It was a turbulent time, and perhaps not too different than our present circumstances.

What we commonly call the reformation was situated in the early 16th century, in the midst of a tremendously chaotic time, not only theologically, but also politically and academically-- there was a lot of things happening!

Luther nailed the 95 theses to the door in October of 1517... And just twenty-five years prior, remember that little saying, in 1492, Columbus sailed the ocean blue. Of course, Columbus was looking for a faster trade route to the orient; King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain were hoping to cash in. Luther and Columbus lived in the same time period.

European powers were interested in expanding trade and influence, the Holy Roman empire was struggling to keep itself together... And in this mix, Luther advanced a highly developed two-kingdom theology, which separated the earthly kingdom from the spiritual kingdom. Kind of like our governing principle of separation of church and state. This is directly due to Luther’s influence.

Also, in that same time period, we saw the beginnings of the scientific method. Copernicus, another contemporary of Luther's, was an astronomer and mathematician. He formulated a model of the universe that suggested the earth rotated around the sun, and not the other way around. This was a big deal because it contradicted the biblical model of creation. We had the beginnings of the collision between science and religion.

So, you see, the reformation was a huge theological change, and it was one big change in the midst of many other big changes. This period of Human history ushered in a time known as the enlightenment and modernity.

And human consciousness itself seemed to change. Facts became more important than values, and this mind-set has been the driver of human endeavor for about five hundred years. Science flourished, fueling everything from physics and chemistry to biology and physiology.

And just imagine where we are today because of it! We've been to the moon and back, almost 50 years ago! Just think of the miracles of medicine-- new knees and hips, new hearts, medications that can help almost everything... We're all living much longer. All because of science, all because of a change in human consciousness.

While we all benefited tremendously from modernity and science, the benefit came at a certain cost. What happened is that we split facts and values apart. We thought facts were more important than values. We worshiped facts. We thought facts were the end all and be all for all truth and the basis for belief. One of the consequences was atheism...

We split the world into objective reality and subjective reality and we became suspicious of the subjective world. We were taught not to trust our emotions. We thought facts are trustworthy and true, emotions are wishy washy and dangerous.

Because of this split between facts and values, the domains of science and religion had an uneasy co-existence. And now, this is slowly changing...

Many scholars believe humanity has entered a new period of history called post-modernity. And believe it or not, it started many years ago. Some scholars argue that elements of post

modernism started to emerge around the mid-20th century, or the 1950's. As with all periods of human history, certain forces start slowly then gain traction and momentum.

One of the elements of postmodernism, is the awareness of human bias in the gathering and interpreting of facts. In other words, facts are not as factual as we thought! Context matters...

This whole notion and self-awareness of bias affects everything. This is why we have FOX news and CNN; different news agencies have different biases. All news agencies will report the news, but they will report the same set of facts in completely different ways.

Today, more than ever we have to watch news from more than one source. If we get locked into one point of view, we risk being uninformed, or worse, brainwashed.

This bias is also why the government seems broken. It's not so much a respectful exchange of ideas anymore, as much as it's about winning at all cost. Politics have become tremendously de-humanizing. Both sides think the other side is evil. And to use biblical language, they all return evil for evil. In this respect, republicans and democrats are absolutely no different than one another, you see the ads, you see the evidence...

And this isn't a matter of one political party or another, or one politician or another... Our politics are just a symptom of a larger phenomenon... Like during the reformation, humanity is turning a corner and we can't quite see what's on the other side. And of course, it's not just our country, it's the whole world.

This is all part of living in a postmodern world. This self-awareness of bias, has many cultural ramifications. Not only do we have multiple versions of the same news, people are suspicious of institutions. This includes not only the government, but education, economics, service organizations, and also, the church... Institutions that we once trusted and believed in, don't have the same respect or authority they used to have.

And I know it sounds scary to a lot of people. Believe me, I've lost a lot of sleep about it...

But there is also something very interesting and very hopeful happening... Instead of splitting facts and values apart, post modernity seems to be putting facts and values back together.

And while this is different than what many of us have known, and it certainly leads to a lot of conflict, it also leads to a certain kind of healing and wholeness. This is the re-integration of our heads and our hearts back together. And it's not one or the other, it's **both, and...** Using both our heads and our hearts.

Perhaps a concrete way for me to explain this, is to say, I believe in the Kingdom of God, not necessarily because of the facts, but because of my heart. And frankly I think Luther would welcome this. Luther was never was a man of facts and objectivity, he was always a man of his heart and conscience. His writings were full of passion.

This is a healing; the reintegrating what it means to be fully human... This is wholeness...

We are justified by grace through faith. Our righteousness is not dependent on good works or following the law, our righteousness is situated squarely on Jesus.

And the teaching of Jesus changes how the world works together. One of the values we hold as Lutherans is that we believe the reformation happened in the past, and we also believe reformation is dynamic and always on-going. Reformation, re-formation is continuous transformation. As God worked through the reformation, God will continue to work through us in this new world.

I believe one of the theological insights that Christianity has to offer the new historical era, is understood as the body of Christ. That Jesus is the unity amidst all our diversity. And this is happening right now, right here...

Ever since I started at Cross of Christ and Cannon River I've seen so many instances of people working together for the common good. All together we are the body of Christ, young and old, Republicans and Democrats, Lutherans and even some Catholics, all working together and for the sake of the world...

This time of the year we celebrate the Harvest Festival. This morning at Cannon River and next week, at Cross of Christ. There is no better way to celebrate being a community together than to share a meal together, and especially a pot luck! We have a lot to be thankful for!

All the hard work of keeping our facilities in good working order, clean, open and available. People with building and maintenance skills... People organizing community wide picnics and blood drives... All the hard work of teaching, the passing on of our faith... All the hard work of missions-- the giving of our resources to help those less fortunate: Feed My Starving Children, the gathering of food, Banks for Gabby, Christmas Shoe Box Project... I think about all this stuff, and it makes me so grateful!

We are a story the world out there needs to hear...

I believe Cross of Christ and Cannon River are places where the Kingdom of God dwells, not because of any facts, but because I recognize it with my heart. These are the values of the Kingdom.

And the good news, is that this is God's doing, God has created us. God has created this love, and this body of believers. We've been faithful through generations and we've been set free...

I welcome post-modernity. This will be the opportunity to follow our hearts as well as our heads. And like the reformation, it will be different than anything we've ever known... And it will still be God's good creation...

I'm not worried about the institution of the church... we are the body of Christ in the world. And I'm not worried about Cross of Christ or Cannon River, we are dwelling places of God, and I believe it not because of the facts, but because you've made my heart sing... And as Luther was fond of saying, "here on earth and hereafter in heaven." Amen...