

The Festival of the Reformation (transferred)
27 October, Anno Domini 2024
Romans 3:19-28

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Beloved redeemed of God,

Many in our day would argue that the time of the Reformation has passed. It's teachings have outlived their usefulness and now Christians everywhere must lay aside their differences and stand united. So much has changed and we have advanced so far in the last 500 years. We are urged to stop splitting hairs about doctrine because what really matters is that we all walk in love. Jesus has set us free and commanded us to love is translated into "I am free to continue living according to the flesh and allow others to do the same because God loves everyone and would never judge. I can sin and there is no consequence either in heaven or on earth."

That is the worst kind of slavery. It is a demonic lie posing as the truth. It is the tyranny of the conscience from which the 16th century reformers sought to free those enslaved by the papacy by holding forth the Word of God in its truth and purity. The false teaching which led sinners to look to their own working and striving for comfort and salvation had led countless souls to despair of Christ as just another manifestation of God's judgment. Instead, they were urged to look to indulgences, prayers to saints, pilgrimages, monastic vows and other supposedly good works. But these are nothing other than the inventions of men which have absolutely zero command or promise from the Lord who died and shed His Blood for us. The Reformation is not simply a passing fad or time-bound expression of Christianity. Its beating heart was the freeing of the conscience through the forgiveness of sins by grace through faith in Christ. If the doctrines of Holy Scripture, restored by God to light at the time of the Reformation are out-dated, then Christ Himself, sacrificed on the cross for the forgiveness of sins is out-dated.

Sinful man is always looking for ways in which he can justify himself before God. He always wants to imagine that he is capable of loving God and serving him. It's our default position. God must be placated and I must do it. So man trots out the best and shiniest works he can perform and demands that God be pleased with them and reward him accordingly. We imagine that by our own reason and strength we can muster up enough obedience to merit eternal life or at least show

God that we're trying.

But the fact of the matter remains, if you sin - at all - you are a slave to sin and sinners stand under God's righteous judgment. If you sin you show that your will desires what is evil and that you are willing to carry out that evil, that which is contrary to God and His will. If you get angry, if you look down on the weaknesses and shortcomings of others and measure their strength against your own, if you withhold compassion and mercy, if you do not pray, if you do not speak out against false teaching, if you choose the things of this world over the hearing of God's Word and receiving the Holy Sacraments - any and all of these things reveal one and the same truth, that you are a slave to your flesh. The Law of God is deaf to excuses and empty justifications. Do the Law. All of it. All the time. Your love for God and your neighbor must be perfect and pure without even the smallest slip.

Now, we are all born under the Law. Whether we like it or not, the Law is binding on us. We may hate the commandments, we may do all sorts of gymnastics to bend and twist the Law to suit our needs. But the Law remains and it will for all eternity because it is the divine and eternal Law which originates in the unchanging will of God Himself. We are not free to excuse ourselves from it. Not believing in God doesn't help any more than not believing that fire is hot will keep you from getting burned when you put your hand in the flame. Nor is a mere outward righteousness sufficient to placate God. It didn't work for Cain. It didn't work for the Israelites. It didn't work for the Pharisees. And it won't work for you. God sees right through it.

The commandments of God are absolute. They are unyielding and unbending. And Jesus didn't come to loosen them or get rid of them. To say that the Reformation is about Christian freedom, is not to say that it was about freedom from God's Law. It is not permission now to indulge the flesh. It is not permission to absent yourself from the Means of Grace. It is not freedom to define the Christian faith as you see fit.

In truth, the Reformation was really a return to true Christian freedom because it was a return to the pure Word of God, unadulterated by the traditions and opinions of man and the pure gift of God's forgiveness in Christ. True Christian freedom, which cost the Son of God His life to win for you, is the freedom from the thundering judgment of guilt that stands against you for your sin because Jesus endured that judgment in your place. True Christian freedom is freedom from the tyranny of self-righteousness and the impossible task of saving yourself by good

works, a devilish trap preached from pulpits everywhere. True Christian freedom is the freedom to open your mouth wide and simply receive in faith the Body and Blood of Christ which were given and shed for you for the forgiveness of all your sins. True Christian freedom is the freedom to rest knowing that your justification, your salvation, your righteousness, your sanctification are all free gifts gladly given by God to sinners who in no way deserve them. True Christian freedom is the freedom to actually live according to the commandments, contrary to the sinful desires of your flesh. True Christian freedom is the freedom to love God and your neighbor more than yourself, to pour out all that you have and are in service to God and your neighbor. True Christian freedom is the freedom to absolutely and freely forgive those who have sinned against you even as you have been absolutely and freely forgiven by God through the propitiatory sacrifice of Jesus.

You, dear sinner, have been set free by the Blood of Jesus! This is the one and eternal Gospel. That is what the Reformation is all about. It isn't about a man or a nation. It isn't about religious freedom in the civil sense. It is about God freely reconciling sinners to Himself through Christ. God doesn't want you to measure your salvation by your works or your righteousness. Those are always insufficient. All have fallen short of God's glory. You cannot be justified by works of the Law, no matter how brightly they may shine among men because the holy Law of God will always reveal the sin that lies beneath in your heart. You are not an exception to that rule.

But neither are you an exception to the fact that the Blood of Christ Jesus has atoned for the sins of the whole world. This atonement is a gift. Gifts aren't received by merit. They are received by faith, trust. What must you do to be saved? Nothing. Christ has already saved you. He already died for your sins. Believe Him when He tells you that He has forgiven you. Believe the Word of God in and with the water of Holy Baptism. Believe the Law and the Prophets and the Apostles who all together with one voice bear witness to the righteousness of God which is shown and given through the Lord Jesus Christ. You do not, you cannot, justify yourself. God alone declares you justified for the sake of Christ when He absolves you of your sins and washes you in the waters of Holy Baptism.

Abide in this Word and so abide in Christ and be free - free from death, free from Satan, free from fear of judgment. Abide in the Holy Absolution which Christ speaks through His servants that is as valid and certain in heaven as if Christ your dear Lord were standing before you Himself. Receive what Jesus gives you. Receive the divine truth that Christ Jesus has redeemed you from sin and death and set you free that you may be His and live under Him in His kingdom. This is the

Reformation. This is what we celebrate this day and every day - that we have been saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

In the Name of +Jesus.

Pastor Ulmer

(We stand.) The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus our Lord.