

Reformation Sunday
"Our Lutheran Family Story"
John 8:31-36
10/27/13

This has been a great month for Community Lutheran, and for me, as your pastor. I can't tell you how much I've enjoyed these past few Sundays. In fact, I wish we had recorded each of the "Walk with Jesus" Faith Stories we've heard.

- Keith Borgschatz, and his story about their apple tree and first fruits giving.
- Jim Krouse, and his story about seeing life as a faith triangle, with God as the foundation of that triangle.
- Stan and Cheryl Newton, and their story about walking with Jesus through grief and loss, and being thankful that God was with them, reminding them of His love and faithfulness, and reminding us, that if something seems to be missing in our lives to never forget that Jesus is with us.
- And then last week, we heard Bill and Margaret Brummel as they shared about the Joy of walking with Jesus, the peace God gives us, when we trust Him.

I wrote to Bill and Margaret this week and thanked them for their openness for sharing in such a real way what it's like to juggle all the financial pressures of raising four kids, and at the same time respond to God's call to give faithfully each year, growing and increasing the percentage of their income they gave right off the top at the beginning of the month. And each year to find out that God was faithful and provided for all their needs.

This morning, if we had time, we all have a faith story to tell, a story of how God has touched our lives, and blessed us.

We could all tell the story about when God first started to become real to us; when God became more than just an idea, and going to worship became more than just something we do out of habit or tradition but something we value because it feeds our souls.

I had a confirmation student surprise me one day, when he told me, "Pastor, if I don't start my week by going to church on Sunday my whole week is messed up. All week, I feel like something is missing, if I don't start my week with God"

So what is your faith story?

What does God mean to you?

What does it feel like when your heart is full and you are thankful for all the ways God has blessed you?

What does it feel like when God has drawn close to you and carried you during a time of loss, or grief?

A few years ago, I heard a speaker who told a neat story about his family. Every Christmas, his wife who is a writer, would spend some time capturing some of their favorite family memories and she would write them in a letter, she placed on their Christmas tree.

And each year they would enjoy opening that letter, and reading it, and they would laugh and cry and re-live those memories.

You see, every family has their stories. But the stories that we remember, the stories about some of those key moments in our lives those are the stories that shape a family's identity.

As a child grows up those are the things that help them remember who they are, and where they came from.

It's the same way in the church. And as you might know, today is Reformation Sunday. Today is an important day for remembering our family story, our Lutheran family story.

And as we Walk with Jesus this coming year, as we walk with Him, in the ways that we serve with our time and talents and our financial gifts it helps to remember our Lutheran family story because it's a story that shapes our identity and our mission. it helps us remember who we are... and what we are called to do.

If I asked you to turn to the person next to you and answer the question: "What historical event is at the heart of our Lutheran family story what would you say?"

Now if you remembered a guy named Martin Luther you're on the right track. Here's a good hint: What did Martin Luther re-discover when he searched the Scriptures?

Prior to that, he felt lost because he felt like he couldn't please God no matter how hard he tried no matter how many prayers he said, or pilgrimages he went on.

So what verse in the Bible opened Luther's eyes? What verse showed Luther a side of God, he had never understood? In Habakkuk two, verse four Martin Luther read: "But the righteous shall live by faith."

This is what Luther wrote about that verse:

"When by the Spirit of God, I understood these words, I felt born again... like a new man. I entered through the doors into the very Paradise of God!"

What Luther re-discovered was the radical grace of God.
And it opened up the whole rest of the Bible, to Luther.

This is what Luther said about the Bible:

“The Bible is alive, it speaks to me; it has feet, it runs after me;
it has hands, it lays hold of me.”

Luther found the same God of Grace in both the Old Testament and the New Testament.
In Ephesians, chapter two, Luther read:

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith...
and this is not your own doing...it is a gift of God.”

The spark that set off the whole Reformation, was when Luther took this message of God’s grace to heart and challenged a traveling preacher named Yohann Tetzel, who had been authorized by the Pope, to sell indulgences.

And so in protest which is where we get the word “Protestant”
Luther posted his 95 Theses on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenburg,
These 95 Theses were not a laundry list of all the things Luther didn’t like about the Roman Catholic Church.

That surprises some people... who picture Luther as this angry monk
who just wanted to pick a fight with the Pope.

These 95 Theses were written as academic essay, with 95 points,
all focused on the one topic of indulgences. And he sent these 95 points out to other scholars
and church leaders inviting them to debate him on this topic.

But once this document hit the printing press, it became too controversial for calm debate.
In just two months they had been distributed throughout the whole continent of Europe.

It is true that Luther was a passionate theologian and he certainly wrote with emotion.
but what angered Luther, was that Johann Tetzel was emotionally manipulating people who
had very little money, the poorest of the poor, to buy a piece of paper, that promised to free
their loved ones from purgatory.

The money that was being raised from selling these indulgences was being sent to Rome to
complete the building of St. Peter’s Basilica,
and also to expand the territory of a prominent German bishop.

Tetzel was scaring the poorest of the poor,
to give what little they had, to enrich those in power.
Can you see why Luther was angry?

Luther wanted the people to experience what he had experienced.
Listen to how he describes it:

“The Gospel is a word of salvation, a word of grace, a word of comfort, a word of joy.”

In other words, it's all gift! no strings attached, no fine print!

Christ has already paid the full price for our sins,
There's nothing left for us to pay.

That's a life-changing truth.

Grace is a gift that frees us to love God and to love our neighbor
Grace frees us to give and to love cheerfully
not out of guilt and not to earn God's favor.

The problem we run into is that Grace, God's pure gift of Grace
is a hard thing for us to grasp and harder still to accept.

The world is not a grace-filled place to live.
The world says what goes around, comes around, “you get what you deserve.”

But when we find God's grace, it changes everything.

Listen to the voice of a modern day - Martin Luther - who re-discovered God's Grace.

The person I'm talking about is Bono, the lead singer and song writer for the rock group, U2.
A journalist who was skeptical of Christian faith, asked Bono,

“Don't you think “appalling things” happen when people become religious?”

But listen to how Bono replied:

“It's a mind blowing concept that the God who created the Universe
might be looking for company, a real relationship with people
but the thing that keeps me on my knees is the difference between Grace and Karma.”

So the journalist asked him, “What is the difference?”

And Bono replied,

“Karma is the idea that what you do, comes back to you
an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth,
or in physics, every action is met by an equal or an opposite one.”

“And yet, along comes this idea called Grace...to upend all that. Love interrupts the consequences of your actions, which in my case, is very good news indeed, because I’ve done a lot of stupid stuff.”

“I’d be in big trouble if Karma was going to be my final judge...”

And then he closed with this comment:

“It doesn’t excuse my mistakes, but I’m holding out for Grace. I’m holding out that Jesus took my sins onto the Cross.”¹

That’s the Gospel.

That’s the good news Martin Luther re-discovered.

That’s our family story.

May your heart, be filled to overflowing, with the Grace and Mercy of God. Amen

¹ As quoted in WORLD, August 6, 2005