

Seth McFarlane, American film maker and creator of the adult animated TV series *The Family Guy*, says that, “If something is shocking without being funny it is hard to justify.” Well, Seth McFarlane and all of you present here today, I have some exceptionally shocking, outrageous, astounding, earth shattering, mind-blowing, inconceivable news for you! And, this shocking, sensational news is not at all funny. In fact, this news is the best news you will ever hear. There is not another bit of news on this planet that comes close to the shocking news we are given today. In fact, this good news is the most honest, most truthful, most life-changing news you will ever hear. And, what is even better than that? Not only is this good news honest, true and shocking **without** being funny, there is no need to **justify** this news because it is all about God and God alone. Seth, and all of you gathered here, are you ready for this shocking maybe even scandalous news? Here it is:

“But now, irrespective of the law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and prophets, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus...”

Now, I don’t know about you but, for me, that news is astounding, truly shocking and life changing! And, this news was so shocking, so

mind-blowing for Martin Luther that it changed his life and, as a result, changed the Church forever.

Martin Luther was a man who struggled. He knew and experienced deep internal struggle because of his own sinfulness. He was a man who knew the depths of depression. He was tormented by his own sinful nature. When writing about his struggle, he said, “Anxiety, terror, weakness, solitude, and temptation come most fiercely at night.”

Martin Luther wrestled with his own weakness, sinfulness and pain and I must be honest with you. I sort of understand the depth of his struggle. I remember a time when I was sitting at my kitchen table in the middle of the night, not knowing what to do. I remember feeling so imprisoned by my life situation and my own brokenness, I did not know where to turn. You see, I thought good Lutheran girls don’t get divorced. Divorce was sinful. I remember several occasions when I would wake up in the middle of the night with my eyes full of tears and found my head lying on a wet pillow. My struggle was so intense I had literally been crying in my sleep. Yes, I have known what it feels like to experience struggle and fear the wrath of God, all because of my own brokenness.

But, listen again to those words from the book of Romans. ““For there is NO distinction, since **all** have sinned and fall short of the glory of

God; they are now **justified by his grace as a gift!"** Did you hear those words? **Justified by his grace AS GIFT!** And, **who** receives that gift? The writer of Romans says, "There is **NO** distinction – **ALL** have sinned, and **ALL ARE JUSTIFIED BY HIS GRACE AS GIFT!**" The Gospel is quite clear. **ALL** receive the gift! When Martin Luther read those words and truly heard what they were saying, he was transformed, and a new movement began which ultimately brought change to the WORLD!! Martin Luther realized that every person stands in the same place. Sin is universal. **ALL** are broken and **ALL** of our relationships with God (and others) are in need of repair. And, when he really heard the message present in this passage from Romans, he realized that God's righteousness does **not** mean God is going to dole out punishment upon us on account of our sin. Oh no, this God whose wrath was feared is doling out **abundant grace!** In fact, God has and continues to shower us with immeasurable **grace and steadfast love** and **this** is the good news that changes our lives. Luther realized that in the person of Jesus, God entered into our lives and God struggles with us. God did not and does not alienate us. In fact, in the person of Jesus, God entered into the darkest depths of all our struggles. And, through Jesus' death and resurrection, God expresses the deepest love, forgiveness and grace for the WORLD. My dear friends, just as sin and

guilt are universal, so is God's grace. Through Christ, God turns our brokenness into something of beauty that transforms the world.

And, that is not all. There is more news that is equally shocking. Did you grasp what the writer of John's gospel was saying in today's reading? This reading from John takes place within the context of a dialogue, a conversation that resembles a courtroom deliberation. The dialogue focuses upon the identity of who Jesus really is. This is a dialogue of faith that centers around two words – truth and freedom. Jesus says, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the **truth**, and the **truth** will make you **free**." The truth Jesus is talking about is himself. This truth is **not** just some concept; it is **not** an abstract idea and it is **not** the opposite of falsehood. This truth is a real, living person – the person of Jesus, himself.

Martin Luther, throughout his struggles and life, participated in this dialogue of faith. He continued in the Word as a disciple of Jesus. When he made his great discovery about justification by God's grace as gift, he finally began to understand the truth of Jesus' identity. He finally was able to understand that Jesus **is** the truth, and Jesus reveals to **us** the truth about God. He knew his own captivity to sin, and he was very aware of the church's captivity to sin. Luther also knew he was not able to free himself

from bondage to sin. His freedom could only come through Christ. This understanding changed him so deeply that he changed his very name from Ludher to Luther, giving himself a name that meant “the free one.”

Martin Luther found himself so deeply transformed by this understanding of truth and freedom that he wanted the church to grasp the reality of the message. Consequently, he nailed his 95 thesis to the church door, and spurred a dialogue of faith that exploded in the Reformation. This explosion was born out of struggle, a deep struggle that transformed the church and **continues** to transform the church. However, becoming truly free is never easy. Luther found out that grace and truth were not cheap. Knowing the truth of Jesus and living in that truth always means facing the cross. And, the cross always means death, death to self, death to systems, death to ideologies, and even death to religious practices when they are not faithful to the Word.

When we face the truth, we ultimately must look at ourselves. We cannot become free of the chains that bind us unless we are able to honestly face those chains and die to self. There are all sorts of ways we live in bondage. Not one of us is totally free. We live in bondage to addictions, to competition, to work (that is me), to any number of things in life, even things that seem good. And, quite often the things that hold us

captive become a way of running from the pain of life. However, the good news for me and for you is that when we stand in the presence of God and are embraced in the gracious loving arms of Jesus, we become able to face the cross. When we continue in the word and become faithful disciples, only then are we able to live into the freedom of the Son.

The Reformation that began with Martin Luther is a Reformation that is ongoing. As Lutherans, we **claim** that we are a reforming church. God continually calls each of us to change and become new beings. God continually calls the church to participate in a dialogue of faith. And, God is continually calling the church to engage in the process of reformation as we live into the in-breaking, coming reign of God.

So, I say to Seth McFarlane and each one of you on this Reformation Sunday, today's message is utterly shocking and transforming and it is not funny! It is the best news you will ever hear and this news does **not** need to be justified. God has done all of the justifying that is needed. Hear Jesus' words, "Continue in my word, become my disciples. Come, let go of your issues and get to know me. As you get to know me better and live with me, I will set you free!"