

Reformation Sunday 10.27.2024

Since I will be on vacation beginning Wednesday, this will be my last sermon before the election. This does not mean that I am going to tell you who to vote for. I will be voting tomorrow. Many of you have voted by mail, others will take advantage of early voting and others will wait until election day. The important thing is to vote.

Leading up to this election the political ads have gotten to be very tedious and I mute most of them. I believe it is best not to listen to them as there are so many half-truths in them that it is not good to base your vote on ads. We all desire people to see the same truth that we do, but unfortunately that is not the case.

Thus, today on this Reformation Sunday, our texts point us to the truth that has kept the church moving forward since it began. We are pointed today to the person who represents truth and that is Jesus Christ. It is in John that we hear him say that he is the way, the truth, and the life and we can only get to God through him. This is a different kind of truth than what may be considered true or false in regards to our upcoming election.

Jesus came to give us freedom from sin, death and the power of the devil. I will not try and decipher truth or fiction from political ads, but I will tell you that I believe in Jesus, the truth who frees us. The truth that we hear about today on this Reformation Sunday, is one of relationship with Jesus, the truth.

Every day Jesus invites us into relationship with him. In our Gospel lesson we hear Jesus telling the Jews who had believed, if you continue in my word, if you abide in my word, if you stay connected to me, then you will be my disciples. Then his disciples will know the truth as they will know him and this is what and who frees us from sin, death and the power of the devil.

Jesus says today that anyone who commits sin is a slave to sin, and they will not have a permanent place in the household. In the Gospel of John sin is defined as not being connected to Jesus. Jesus invites everyone to be connected to him, to be in relationship with him. Jesus has told us that it is only through him that we can get to God.

Thus, it is only Jesus who frees us from sin, death and the power of the devil. Jesus has done the work for us and now he is asking us to be in relationship with him, to be connected to him. Jesus is God's grace revealed to us. Jesus is truth revealed.

Even though there is no way to really verify any of this, we are asked to have faith and believe. We have been given God's Word to help us know the story of God's people. We are then invited into that story.

Paul lays out for us in our second lesson what we stand on as Lutheran theology, justification by grace through faith. This is what I have already been explaining. God sends Jesus to earth to die on the cross to forgive our sin. We are asked to believe this to be true.

Jesus' death justifies us before God out of love, God's grace. We are then asked to believe and receive. There is nothing that we can do to justify ourselves before God for our sin.

It sounds easy, but often as human beings we want to earn it, we want to do something, and this is where the law comes in. The law can point out to us the need for God's grace, but it cannot justify us. Instead, the law is what we live out in love as a response to our justification by grace.

Paul wrote this letter to the house churches in Rome to prepare them for his visit. He was attempting to address the polarization between the Jews and Gentiles. Paul was trying to reconcile the two groups. Does this polarization sound familiar?

I'm sure the Jews were saying the law is what leads to salvation and the Gentiles may have been saying, no there is nothing that we can do, thus we don't have to keep the law. Paul is trying to say please be quiet and listen because he is saying that they are both wrong.

There is a place for law and Gospel. Through the law comes the knowledge of sin, thus law is important but does not save us. We are justified by grace as a gift. This does not leave us off the hook as we are called to believe this, and God in Jesus Christ asks us for a response which we can model through the way that we live out our lives.

In the end, Paul is trying to say that, all are welcome, as all are justified by grace through faith. This all does not exclude anyone. The exclusions we see today are decided by human beings. How does this help their polarization, let alone our own? I believe Paul is saying that just by pointing fingers and saying someone is wrong does not change the fact that all are welcome in God's kingdom.

We are all in the same boat, but not all will ever realize that. The only thing that we can do is live out our faith as justified by grace children of God. It seems throughout history we have been trying to learn how to love our neighbor, to welcome our neighbor. It becomes such a fearful thing that instead of welcoming we try to gain control over them.

Jesus continually calls us to stick with him as he is the truth revealed. He is the one who justifies us before God because no human being can. We continually repeat history, and I wonder if it is happening faster with media and technology.

We pray that our vote will continue democracy and continue to welcome all people. The freedoms we have as citizens of the United States of America are gifts from God are supposed to be for the betterment of the community and not any one group of people. Our vote is the only control that we have over these freedoms. The freedom we have through Jesus work on the cross is an absolute free gift.

As justified children of God we are not called to change people's minds, but we are called to stick with Jesus and continue responding to his call to love God and neighbor. We don't know what the future holds, but we do know who holds it. This is where are focus needs to be.

Let us pray: God of freedom, we thank you for the freedoms in our country, but above all for the freedom paid for by your Son, Jesus Christ. May your Holy Spirit help us to focus on you and living as justified by grace as your children. No matter what happens in the election, you continue to call us to connect with Jesus, the truth and thus to continue to love you and our neighbor. In Jesus' name, Amen