

Pastor Roy's Sermon from October 28, 2012

Readings: Jeremiah 31:31-34, Ps. 46, Romans 3:19-28, John 8:31-36

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

Reformation Sunday is a confession that the church must always be reforming itself. During the 1500s Martin Luther called the church to be faithful and be reformed. The church is always an expression of its own humanity even as the Spirit draws us into greater and deeper truths of the Gospel. Luther translated the Scriptures into the common language, and called pastors to teach their congregations to pray and learn to follow Christ faithfully.

There have been reformers as long as there has been faith. The prophets in the Old Testament were reformers calling Israel to worship the one true God of justice rather than the self serving, destructive civil religion gods in each generation. Serve justice. Worship the God of justice and mercy.

Jesus was a reformer, calling Jews to welcome the weak, the weary, the poor, not just those who can pay for salaries and buildings. Paul was a reformer, calling the church to invite even gentiles apart from Jewish traditions to follow Christ. Almost every epistle calls the church to reform its ways and become more faithful to Christ and his love and freedom.

Jeremiah calls Israel to allow God to write the law of love upon their hearts—love of God, love of neighbor, love of self—for most, it's easy to love God. If we try, it is not that hard to love our neighbor. But ourselves? We can't get away from ourselves. But if we keep working at it, we can accept and love ourselves, then we can and will love just about anyone. The heart of the prophet's message is that grace is the foundation of life. Grace begins at home. Grace begins with me.

Is that not what Paul means when he writes that those who have faith in Christ, in the Way of Christ, are justified by grace, are redeemed by the grace of the gracious one, Jesus Christ who freely welcomed and served and loved?

He goes on to remind us that the highest and greatest law is faith. Faith in God's goodness, mercy, and peace. We do well to understand everything through the lens of faith. If we get it backwards, and understand faith through the lens of our own suffering, then we are still lost.

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!" If we know Christ first and foremost, then we will be free and everything else will be a footnote to his faithful Presence. Our lives will have a solid foundation of faith from which everything else flows. We have hope because we see with God's eyes, we hear with God's ears, we touch and heal with God's hands as our feet take us to where God is. God is here. God is now.

God is here waiting for us regardless of where we find ourselves. In our cars, in our homes, in our jobs, and in our retirement! God is always waiting, watching, leading quietly.

There is always God's goodness and mercy to which we can apply our efforts. This truth which sets us free, this foundation for living--we must center ourselves daily and hourly in this truth. It will never force itself upon us. We must seek it quietly, patiently, faithfully. Never give up when we fail. Never force it on others, for God is speaking this truth equally to all of us, gently, inviting a faithful response.

But as quiet as it may be, we should never underestimate the power of the Spirit of Grace. It's like the power of a good example—it works, supports, empowers, and brings freedom.

Now, how is this relevant? It's the answer to the question, "What should we be doing with our lives, our resources, our energy?" "How can we reform the church?" "What service opportunities should we support?" "What is our priority?" "What is our mission?" "How can we be faithful to the mercy of God?"

These and all questions are answered in prayer. Quiet trust in God. Reform comes as we listen to God's Spirit. Waiting patiently for mercy and peace. Trusting--when we feel lost, when we are weary, when we think there is no hope--trusting that Christ has already gone before us showing us the way, even when that way is littered with questions and suffering. There were plenty of questions and suffering for Christ and all who have gone before us. Their example teaches us that eternal life springs not from convenience and comfort, nor acceptance of the status quo, but from giving ourselves over into the care of God in our questions and suffering—in gathering the courage to act, as did Jesus, as did Martin Luther. The grace of God is the reforming power of the church. This grace is sufficient for us.

Thanks be to God.