

Happy Reformation Day! Wait. Is it not? Am I early!?

Should it really be October 31 when we blow the trumpets? That is the commemoration of the nailing of the 95 theses, the beginning of it all. Certainly this is the current Reformation day, when Lutherans and protestants all around the world celebrate the step away, not necessarily from the Catholic Church, because the divide that occurred is all too sad, but the step away from the idea that works are required for salvation. But is this when we should celebrate the Reformation?

Should it be June 25, the anniversary of the presentation of the Augustana, the Augsburg Confession, the core of the Christian faith as we Lutherans confess it? It is this document, along with the rest of the confessions that followed, from which we draw our doctrine, our beliefs, our understanding of the Word and the certain hope that we confess. This too is an important day. And historically, it was the day that people—particularly Lutherans—celebrated the Reformation.

But what if every Sunday, maybe even every day, was the anniversary of the reformation? What if every day could be a re-enactment of the Reformation? I would say that any day the purity of the Gospel is proclaimed and received by the Church and her members, wherever they are found, the joy of the reformation is celebrated again. Whenever the Gospel is preached, the spirit of the reformation continues, for it was truly the Gospel which, while never lost, was clouded for many years and today we rejoice and revel in it.

Today, in our readings, we see this gift of God's grace, of His salvation: In our Gospel Jesus says "abide in my word and you are a disciple. Truth and freedom will be yours, free of charge!" This was crucial to the reformation then and to our salvation today.

But our text displays for us another common Lutheran idea, one teeming with grace and one you and I have the privilege of wrestling with all our days. Today's reading gives us a good picture of what came to be known as the *Simul*, the at-the-same-time saint and sinner—you and I. But our text

uses different words. We are simultaneously slave and free, at the same time sinner and disciple. And in the midst of that, there is grace for us. Which is good, because, oh how we need it.

On this day Lutherans can become quite confident, proud even, of our history. We might proclaim "We're descendants of Luther. We've never been slaves of anyone; we are the perfect disciples and saints." We hear both Law and Gospel, knowing that Grace has the final word and so we're proud of our freedom.

Some days, it's as if possession of this doctrine of grace, as pure as we might keep it, equates to salvation.

As if possession of the doctrine equates to us believing it at all times.

It might even seem as if being slaves to sin doesn't apply to us because the Church is so lucky to have us...

And even for those among us who don't declare that Lutherans are perfect—because you're right; we aren't—we can all fall into the trap of believing that even though we were once slaves to sin—have you seen my past life?—It's okay, now I'm free.

We have managed to clean ourselves up and therefore we are an asset to the Church. They are lucky to have my voice, my hands, my feet, my ideas. God was smart to bring me in because, look at me!

We're glad to be disciples, gung-ho about what will come next in life, but we forget the reality of sin that existed... and that the reality of sin still exists.

And if the reality of sin exists, then we remain slaves of sin. We are not free, not like we hope. All Christians, no matter how clean your life looks, no matter how correct your doctrine is, remain slaves to sin and thus ought not become proud, nor even confident because on our own, we remain hooped. At no point in life do we pass some sort of threshold that has us as "good to go" for the rest of our days.

We all go astray, in thought, word, deed, and doctrine. And each time this happens, we need a reformation.

But Jesus' remedy for our wandering lives is this: Abide in my Word, he says.

In the 16th century, it was the Word which spurred change. In the text of Holy Scripture Luther was confronted with the constant, never satiated condemnation of the Law, and it was also here that He learned that the righteous shall live by faith, that his righteousness would never be enough, but that Christ's righteousness was perfect, and in fact it was made his own in his baptism.

And this is the same working Word which had reformed the Church whenever it went astray; whenever heretics arose to twist the Word, it wasn't man who could refute and defend the faith but instead the Word alone could reform it. Thus the Word was maintained, proclaimed throughout the centuries despite every effort of sinful man to twist it, to weaken God's law to make it attainable, to make the Gospel less so that we could play a part in our salvation. Time after time, the living Word reformed His bride, not into something a little newer and shinier, but into something pure and holy, something His own.

But the Word doesn't just work on the church as a whole; it also reforms the individuals therein. The Word which took on flesh in order to die for each person that He created, the Word which *did something*, continues to do something.

So whether you're new to this Christianity thing, or whether you've spent all your days in the Church, do not cease to abide in the Word—because it is working. It is applying Christ's life, death, and resurrection to you. Read it, sing it, remember it, consume it. Here in the Word you are reformed.

Now, you are not reformed into a better version of yourself, as if abiding in the Word and being a disciple was to teach and therefore guide you to being better. This is the common misconception of discipleship. Be taught and apply yourself in order to be a good student. Learn the lessons and try it out. Stumble and fall until you master it. Nope. That's not it. being a disciple of Christ is entirely different. We are to sit at the feet of our Lord and listen, and as He speaks everything changes. This is precisely why we come to Church, where the Word is proclaimed and ministered. Here, we are changed.

We are re-formed from slave to free, from unrighteous to righteous, from a son and daughter of Adam to a Son and Daughter of God, from dead to alive, from sinner to saint. This powerful Word frees us from the condemnation and enslavement of the Law, speaking His perfect life in place of our less-than-perfect days. This Holy Word separates us from the Sin which characterizes our days, proclaiming and performing absolution over us. This eternal Word separates us from the power of death, proclaiming eternal life over us and promising us, in our Baptism that death is now simply a door to perfect life.

And all of these perfect realities are what it means to be a disciple of Christ. Not that we have managed to accomplish them but that the Word has changed us from a sinner into His disciple. Certainly we remain the sinner until our sinful flesh is finally dead, but here, from the pulpit and the font and the altar, Christ proclaims His remarkable gifts through my lowly lips in order to transform you as many times as you have Sundays on this earth (and even more times in between).

So today, you have been and are being re-formed. By the remembrance of your baptism in the invocation to the words of absolution, from the readings to the sermon to the texts of the songs, to what we will receive in Holy communion until the blessing we find in the benediction. God's Word is working on you to constantly reform you into the perfect image of His Son. May you constantly know your need for reformation, because our sinful selves want to stray to our own ways. And yet just as much as we remain wandering sinners, His Word remains faithful to create out of us His perfect disciples, His saints. Today and always.

So indeed, even though it's not the 31st, Happy reformation day.