



## “Heart of Faith”

Reformation Sunday  
8:15 and 11:00 a.m. Sunday, October 30, 2016  
The Reverend Dr. Jack M. Horner, Jr.  
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church  
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Jeremiah 31:31-34; Romans 3:19-28; John 8:31-36

Grace and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.  
Amen.

Today we celebrate the 499<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. That makes this coming year the 500<sup>th</sup> celebration culminating next year. The Reformation began quite simply as an academic exercise in which Martin Luther, a professor of Old Testament at Wittenberg University, offered to his colleagues and students 95 Articles for discussion and for debate around the topic of confession. To the medieval church confession is very, very important. If you've ever gone to Europe to visit the churches, you are struck by the large doors entering into those worship spaces with portals often Jesus at the very top followed by disciples and saints, making its way all the way down to the bottom finally those persons caught in purgatory and hell. You'll notice right away there are more sinners at the bottom than there are saints at the top. Confession was serious business. It cost something. And for those who grew up in the middle ages the emphasis was on doing the right thing and of course the best way to do the right thing was to be a priest or follow in a religious order, but to also be prepared to pay for those sins. Over time this even meant paying indulgences, money that is given to the church for the sins of not only yourself but even perhaps those who had previously died. It was considered a long way away, a movement away from the Bible in what Paul says to the church in Rome, our second reading.

Paul makes it very clear that all have sinned and have fallen short of the Glory of God. None of us are in a place to judge others with our own moral superiority. We are all under the same condemnation for our sins, and also in need of the same reconciliation of our Savior Jesus Christ. Paul is writing to persons who are both Jewish background and Gentile background. Paul says both of these believers have it wrong. The Jewish believers have it wrong because they think that they have the upper hand over the Gentile believers because they are living in a way in accord with the Torah with the law of God. The Gentile believers think they are superior because they are somehow free from the law because of God's grace. Paul says to both of them neither one of you is correct. God gives us the law as a gift and we are supposed to act. The law in and of itself isn't necessarily bad, it helps us to distinguish right from wrong. But we never want to forget that it is God who is the main actor in all of this. And so, Paul uses these wonderful action verbs to describe the activity of God in relation to our sin.

It is God who has put forth Jesus as an atonement for our sins.  
It is God who did this to show his righteousness to his creation.

It is God who passes over our sins.

It is God who justifies us, who puts us in a right relationship with him, not because of what we do, or what we pay, or how we live our life, but because of God's free grace to us. God acts through Jesus in order to bring reconciliation with all of us. God acts to give us his goodness and love.

If we look around our world though, we'll see that it is not very loving. If we look around our world we see that it's not very peaceful. If we look around our world we see that people do not live up to God's will in their life. In the words of a modern-day actress, our world is a hot mess. It is easy for us to look around and see the brokenness of human relationships in our world. We can just ask either one of the presidential candidates.

The system, the human system is broken and there is nothing else that will fix it except the Savior. Martin Luther once said, "So when the devil throws your sins in your face and declares that you deserve death and hell, tell him this: "I admit that I deserve death and hell, what of it? For I know One who suffered and made satisfaction on my behalf. His name is Jesus Christ, Son of God, and where He is there I will be also!" God is still at work redeeming us, making us whole, forgiving us of our sins. He says I will remember their sin no more. That is an unconditional promise given to us by our God. How different is that from the world in which we normally live. We are so quick to remember our own sins and to torture ourselves or other people's smallest slights and largest transgressions. We can't forgive ourselves and others and instead we just hold it in where it destroys our own inter- being.

Jeremiah was talking to a people who over the centuries had refused to heed the call of the prophets and repent. He calls them stubborn people who had turned their backs on God because of their actions and inaction. Sure, they worshiped, but without love in the hearts. They tried to live ethical and moral lives, but they didn't care for the poor and the strangers in their midst, and the people suffered because of their actions and inactions. Punishment, exile, oppression and the destruction of their beloved city of Jerusalem at the hand of other nations. And so, Jeremiah shares with the people God's intention for them, that in spite of their disobedience, in spite of their sins against God and against each other, God would make for them a promise, a covenant, and he would put faith in their hearts. He would put trust in their hearts so that they would all know the one true God. God himself would put his heart within their heart. And God's heart is utterly faithful to us. God's heart is true to us in spite of us. God is not like people. God remembers people, but he refuses to remember our sin. And God's grace breaks the cycle of sin and hurt, brokenness and ultimately death, not through more laws, but through faith which permeates the very core of our being.

Again, Luther said, "This life, therefore is not righteousness, but growth into righteousness, not health, but healing, not being but becoming, not rest but exercise. We are not yet what we shall be, but we are growing toward it, the process is not yet finished, but it is going on, this is not the end, but it is the road. All does not yet gleam in glory, but all is being purified."

You and I by God's grace are a work in progress. We have been brought into a

relationship with God through the cross and resurrection. A relationship of trust and mutuality and we are called to do the same for our brothers and sisters. God's heart is opening us up, moving us, and transforming our hearts. That's why Luther on his seal puts the cross at the very center and the heart of the very center of his seal. Our heart of faith with the cross of Christ at the center is strengthened in the power of God for mission and ministry through his grace and mercy. Amen.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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