

Reformation Sunday 2020

Year A, October 25, 2020

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

One of the congregations that my husband served years ago, used to talk about the “good old days” when the church was packed and so was the Sunday School. In looking at the Sunday School they averaged more than 100 people in worship on Sundays and more than 50 adults and children in Sunday School. Of that number in attendance in Sunday School, very few attended church as well, citing “they

had worship in the opening of Sunday School, they didn’t have to go to church as well.”

We tend to think back on the years past, the years after WWII as the golden days of the church. The “glory” days of the church, when the pews were full and the Sunday School was teeming with children and adults as well. Back then I remember our church was much the same, with two Sunday School periods a Sunday because the building could not accommodate them all at once. There were three services each Sunday, 8 am, 9:30 am and 11 am, and one of those services was in the

German language. Ah. The good old “glory days.”

Oh, how we love to recall the old “glory” days, the way things “used” to be. But folks, times change. Times change and the old days are left behind and we live into a new reality.

In the gospel lesson for today, Jesus is trying to get his Jewish believers to realize that with him, they are to be living into a new reality. He says to them, “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth and the truth will make you free.” But the Jews reply, “What are you talking about? We

are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone.”

Even after following Jesus for awhile, they don’t get it. They don’t get that Jesus is ushering in a new reality for them, and their relationship to the past is made unimportant. They are clinging to the old glory days of Israel’s relationship with God instead of recognizing who Jesus is and living into a new reality with him. Times have changed and new things are on the horizon through Jesus.

Much the same was true in the times of Martin Luther. The church became a slave to its old practices and its old ways of connecting with

the people in the pew. There were abuses in the church like paying for indulgences so that loved ones would get reduced sentences in purgatory, there was a big market for the selling of so-called relics of the church, of Jesus, John the Baptist and of the apostles or the Virgin Mary.

All so that the Pope could build St. Peter's basilica in Rome. The people this hurt the most were the poor, the sick and the elderly.

The church made salvation a pay to play system, rather than relying on the loving grace of God, and our faith in that loving grace.

With the Reformation things changed. The service was no longer in the Latin, but in the

German language of the people. The faith went from works righteousness where to be saved you had to complete tasks to prove that you were good and you deserved to be saved, to a faith that believed in the grace of God in Christ Jesus above works led to salvation. With the Reformation things changed. Times changed, and it wasn't a bad thing. The people changed and became more confident in the grace of God and in their faith. The scripture was put into the hands of the people and into their own language so that they could read it and study it on their own. The reforms of the Reformation taught us that God comes to each of us in Jesus Christ,

that God loves and saves us through Jesus Christ.

The same is true today when we look to the “good old” “glory days” of our individual congregations. It is time to honor the past, but to leave it in the past. It is time to understand that we need new ways of engaging people today. We need to understand that living with the Covid 19 plague is going to continue for some time and that perhaps what we knew as normal isn't coming back. It's time to consider what the future may look like for us as a congregation gathered in the name of Jesus, what worship may look like for us and for those

in the world who are listening to the story of Jesus for the first time. The video services that we have posted on our YouTube page have been viewed more than 1300 times since March of this year. Our average attendance in those months would only be 240. Look at all of the people outside of this building we are reaching with the word of God?

Jesus tells us that “if the Son makes you free you shall be free indeed.” That indeed is a message to share with the world in any way that we can. We have been freed in Christ for the salvation of the world.

May we all commit to making that salvation of
the world a reality in our communities and
across the world. Amen.