

## 7 Last Words

From the Bible: Deuteronomy 34: 1-6 and Matthew 22: 34-40

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I know this is not the usual way I begin my Sunday morning reflection, but I spent some time this week preparing a special musical selection which I would like to share with you this morning.

*Happy Anniversary to you.*

*Happy Anniversary to you.*

*Happy Anniversary Reformation.*

*Happy Anniversary to you.*

Thank you. Thank you.

I know...

It is either I should not quit my day job or I should just stop here because anything more would just be going downhill.

So, this happened.

At least the way the remembered story goes.

500 years ago, on October 31, 1517, the Roman Catholic monk and university lecturer, Martin Luther, took on the Roman Catholic Church and divided the Christian world by nailing his 95 complaints against the Church to the door of All Saints Church in Wittenberg, Germany.

Because of his actions and his refusal to recant, he was excommunicated by the Pope and branded an outlaw by the Emperor. While history is always more nuanced than remembered story, his actions are credited with launching what became known as the Protestant Reformation which means you and I can worship here this morning rather than in St. Patrick's Church on the other side of the Village Green.

Reformation Sunday, which on Protestant church calendars, is always celebrated on the last Sunday in October, is not a day I usually pay much attention to, but obviously today is different. Today, the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther's infamous act, is an opportunity for us to think together about who we are and who we are called to be. And, to think together about what "church" means for you and for me, but also, and maybe more importantly, what "church" might mean for those who, because of perceptions or misperceptions or reality turn their back on religion and for those who hold faith at arm's length and who may never set foot inside these doors or set foot inside anyplace which has *church* as a part of its name.

The sermon title for this morning is "7 Last Words" referencing that pithy, church professional saying about the seven last words of the church which are "*We have always done it that way.*" Luther's 95 complaints against the Roman Catholic Church were more thoughtful and more theological than that, but in some ways he was saying, "We don't have to do it that way." Even,

"We need to do it differently...we need to be different today than yesterday." because if we don't whatever word of hope we have to speak, whatever light we have to add, whatever witness we have to make will be lost because no one will hear or see or care.

All of this was prompted not only by the date on the calendar, but by the fact that this morning we baptized Samuel and later this afternoon Kathy DiBiasi and I will gather with 7 or 8 Ninth graders and begin our Confirmation program for this year. Which prompts this question....

How will we....

Not just Kathy and I, but you as well.

How will we talk with them - with Samuel and others his age and with our high school students and with others their age - about God and faith and church?

How will we describe and model what it means to be a Christian?

How will describe and model what it means to follow in the way and in the spirit of Jesus?

How will we help them be strong enough and deep enough that they hold onto values embedded in our faith which stand counter to hatred and bigotry and to our predisposition to violence as a way to resolve problems. All of that in a world that you and I can only begin to imagine. Or maybe even a world we can't imagine at all.

Let's be honest.

We may not like it.

We may like the old hymns we learned as children growing up better than the newer hymns we sometime sing. We may like the King James version of the Bible even if it is inaccurate and sometimes wrong. We may like it when everyone showed up every Sunday rather than being pulled in a hundred different directions.

But that is not the reality today.

That's not the church today.

That's not what being a Christian is about today.

(It wasn't what being a Christian was about back then, either but that is another sermon.)

Maybe you and I are a bit like Moses in the passage we read together this morning from the book of Deuteronomy.

Doing all this work.

Leading the people the best he could.

Holding the church we know and love together.

Making our pledge, paying the bills, planning the programs. And what does it get us?

Only this.

To stand on the hillside of today catching only the faintest glimpse of the promise and possibility of tomorrow. Does that mean all we do today doesn't matter?

Absolutely not.

Because the tomorrow we cannot see is the future today creates.

What I know is this.

The understanding of church and community and what that means and how it is shaped and formed, and what it looks like to follow Jesus is and will be different for my young adult children than it is for me.

The understanding of church and community and what that means and how it is shaped and formed, and what it looks like to follow Jesus will be different for the 9th graders Kathy and I will meet with later today than it will be for my children.

The understanding of church and community and what that means and how it is shaped and formed, and what it looks like to follow Jesus will be different for Samuel and his peers than it will be for our 9th graders in Confirmation.  
Reformation all over again.

And, I also know this...

Whatever it looks like...

However church or faith or community is pulled or put together...

Whatever glimpse we get of the Promised Land...

If it is faithful, we will find this at its core.

The second passage we shared today.

Jesus summing up the entire Biblical witness

This entire book in **these** seven words.

Love God.

Love your neighbor as yourself.