

Reformation Oct 31, 2010

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Four hundred and eighty three years ago today, a 34 year old German priest and professor named Martin Luther, nailed a paper on the castle church door containing a list of 95 points of faith he wanted to discuss. The young Luther had experienced a personal conversion in the way he understood God which did not square with what he saw in the church of his day. God was not an angry judge who could never be satisfied but rather a God of love.

Luther discovered the story of God in the Bible told of a God who was waiting with open arms for wayward children to come home. Being made "right with God" was not up to us and how "good" we could be. Instead, God gives love and mercy to people as a **free gift, with no strings attached.**

That's one of the most [radical](#) thoughts ever unleashed into the world.

It's nearly impossible to believe really. It goes against everything we experience as human beings. We live our whole lives trying to prove ourselves to one another, trying to show we deserve the love we so desperately crave. We are taught from little on that we must earn what we get and do good in order to receive approval. The world tells us that what we **do** determines **who we are.**

Luther rediscovered that it is the [other way around.](#) **Who we are determines what we do.** We are children of God, made free by the death and resurrection of Jesus our brother. It doesn't matter how anyone else sees you. God sees in a way humans can't and there is no power of darkness, no tragedy, no poverty, or abuse, or scandal, or despair, or sickness, or death that can ever cloud God's vision or separate us from God's love.

Believe it!

Trust it!

God loves and forgives you! AMEN

Yes Amen! But that is not the end of this sermon because too often, the preaching of the free gift of grace has stopped short. We have heard about the free gift but we often set it on the back closet shelf and forget to open it. In our zeal to advertise the gift of God as free, we sometimes think it doesn't matter what we do –that we can say or do what we want because God will always forgive us.

That is one of the most [dangerous](#) thoughts ever unleashed into the world.

What we do **does** matter. Jesus says those who hear his words AND act on them are like someone who builds a house on a rock. Those who do not act on them build their house on shifting sand. But the **hearing** comes first. It is the hearing of God's word of grace -of God's acceptance and hope- that changes how we live and what we do.

The power of [Jesus' death and resurrection ends the despair](#) and hopelessness we feel in our own lives. Like a child who receives a new coat and then never wants to take it off, the gift of God's grace changes our entire outlook on life. The old feelings of fear and shame lose their power and pretty soon we find a freedom to act like never before. It is the power to grant forgiveness and love even to our enemies.

The reformers invited everyone into something they called the "priesthood of all believers". [Everyone has a job to do in God's kingdom.](#) My calling to a ministry of preaching and administering the sacraments is no more holy than a calling to teach or learn, to till the land, or raise a family, fix highways, cut hair, repair machinery, sell cars, or care for the sick or elderly. I'm betting that even retirement is a holy calling that God uses in ways you never imagined!

Enter our friend Zacheus. Everyone thought that if anyone was undeserving of God's acceptance, it was him. People assumed he was an unpatriotic sell-out who kept a lot of the taxes he collected for Rome in his own pocket. Notice how Jesus responds to this "sinner". [Jesus invites himself over for supper.](#) Zacheus feels an acceptance he had likely never known before. Up to this point in Luke, Jesus has not said many good things

about rich people but here is a rich man who knows how to share. His job, his vocation, is more than just collecting taxes. He is a spreader of salvation.

Through our vocations, through our "doing", we open the gift of God's undeserved grace and spread it into the world as well. That "doing" has unlimited expressions. Together as a mission center, it seems [we have had a flurry of activity](#) in recent months. Coats have been given away, school kits put together, quilts tied, strangers helped, and with our offerings, we have contributed to the greater mission of God in the world through the many agencies and ministries of the NE Synod and the ELCA. [God is at work](#) in all of these things, creating and reforming the world and transforming lives.

But there is something else. Another kind of "doing" that is just as important. [It is simply living with joy](#). It is the hope we share. It is the smile we give, the acceptance we show, and the prayers we offer. [There is no "dis" ability when it comes to God](#). All ability is powerful ability when strengthened by faith in the God who makes the impossible possible. Even in the smallest of acts is the power to change a life, perhaps our own!

So on this Reformation day, we celebrate the undeserved grace of God. We give thanks that God gives us the faith so we can know we are loved. [That love is not in vain](#) but provides a **power** and a **hope** that changes who we are and what we do. It is a process, not just a one time event so I leave you with this quote from Martin Luther about the transforming power of God's grace unleashed in our lives.

"This life, therefore, is not godliness but the process of becoming godly, not health but getting well, not being but becoming, not rest but exercise. We are not now what we shall be, but we are on the way. The process is not yet finished, but it is actively going on. This is not the goal but it is the right road. At present, everything does not gleam and sparkle, but everything is being cleansed."

Classic Lutheran attributes for Reformation Sunday

...you only serve Jell-O in the proper liturgical color for the season.

...rather than introducing yourself to a visitor at church, you check them out in the guest book.

...you have your wedding reception in the fellowship hall and feel guilty about not staying to help clean up.

...you make spaghetti at your house with the little macaroni noodles because they're not so messy then.

...you think butter is a spice.

...the church is on fire, and you rush in to save the coffee pot.

...the only open pew is up front, so you volunteer to shovel the sidewalk.

...you think casserole (hotdish) is one of the major food groups.

...you freeze the leftover coffee from fellowship hour for next week.

...you hear something really funny and smile as loud as you can.

...you're watching "Star Wars" in the theatre and when they say, "May the force be with you," and you reply, "and also with you."

...you think that an ELCA Lutheran bride and an LCMS groom make for a "mixed marriage."

...every time something changes, the old one was better