

Rom 3 Reformation in Life and Faith

Delivered at Hope Community, 10-25-2009

Texts:

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Romans 3:19-28

John 8:31-36

SERMON

I'd like you to think back a few years....10 years.... 20 years... (or perhaps 5 years for our younger folks)

How have you changed?

Physically: Taller, rounder, wrinkly?

Personality: more mellow, less impetuous?

Has your career taken different directions?

Over time we change. Sometimes intentionally... other times unavoidably.

Sometimes things just change around us, and we are caught up in it.

Sometimes we decide to change. We see something in ourselves that we don't like much, or just something we want to make better. Sometimes we decide to go in a whole new direction.

I'd like to share with you a story of some big changes. They started a long time ago, and the ripples from that time are still feeling felt around the world.

It was a time of BIG THINGS going on in the world. Yes indeed. The late 1400's saw lots of exciting stuff: Leonardo DaVinci was inventing things. Columbus sailing to America in 1492 and telescopes allowed people to see "the heavens." The printing press and pocket watch were brand new things. But not everything was good. The economy was in pretty bad shape, Mongol and Moor armies were on the move and the Black Plague was killing off millions. Many believed that the signs pointed to God's judgment and believed the world would end on Dec 31, 1499. They had count-downs to Y1.5K just like we did 500 years later.

In the midst of all this excitement a young boy, Martin Luther, was born in Germany in 1483. His parents doted on him and worked hard to get him the best education – he was going to be a lawyer! And there's every indication that he was going to be a good one. He did excellent in school and was making great progress – until one stormy night.

The lightning storm that changed it all in the Summer of 1505. Ground strikes around him, and a tree split beside him, Martin vowed to God that he would devote his life to Christ if only god would save him.

Martin survived the night – and kept his promise. He joined a monastery – and informed his parents of his career change.

We might call this the beginning of Martin's "**personal reformation**"

That night he vowed and committed to serve God faithfully, all the time. No excuses. He may not always know what that meant, but he was going to faithfully try and figure it out. He wanted to love God – and to be loved by God.

But he immediately started out with troubles. Martin grew up with a picture of God as a stern, angry judge demanding perfection from an imperfect person and waiting to send him to hell. He was brought up with verses like:

Hebrews 10:26-27 For if we willfully persist in sin after having received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, ²⁷ but a fearful prospect of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.

How could you love a god like that? He got this impression from the church – not the Bible. He never even *saw* a Bible until he was 20. So like everyone else, he lived in fear. Fear of eternal damnation, and the only way to avoid it was to be perfect.

At the monastery, Luther outdid all the other brothers in acts of service, prayer, study and piety. He wore out his confessors with constant confession of the smallest sins. He volunteered for the lowest, dirtiest jobs. He was bound and determined to show God he was good enough for God's love. It didn't work. No matter how hard he tried, he still found no peace with God.

But at the monastery he also started to actually READ the Bible, in Latin, which he had learned for his law degree. And when he started READING the Bible, he started finding things that he never knew were there. Things like the book of Romans – and these two powerful verses.

Romans 3: ²³ since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; ²⁴ they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,

That was the next big "reformation" in Martin's life – and the one that snowballed into everything else.

I'd like to share with you three of Martin's "reformations" – ones that have been passed down to us, and which we celebrate here today.

Martin's Reformation #1: Salvation - by Grace through Faith

Martin tried to get salvation through being perfect – and all he accomplished was "moral despair"

– realizing just how imperfect he was, and that he couldn't possibly make himself perfect enough.

He couldn't be perfect, and he couldn't just live a life of sin and be at peace with himself OR God.

Flat on the ground, face down, admitting he couldn't do it. All was lost. But in those verses in Romans, then in the Gospels, and even in the OT, he found something he never new, a whole new way of looking at our relationship with God. We CAN'T be perfect enough – God's salvation is a gift that we cannot earn. Our faithfulness – our trying to live a sinless life – is not our way to heaven, it is our way of saying thank you to God, honoring God, and loving God back.

All this came about because Martin actually started to READ the bible – which results in **Martin's Reformation #2: Scripture - Freeing the Word of God**

Martin encouraged people to read the Word – the scriptures in their own language – just like he did. Read it for themselves. Consider it a gift from God, given to us to be read. The church had tried to protect the scriptures, figuring that it would be confusing to most folks.

Well, it can be confusing – but it can also be enlightening, exciting, freedom giving and life saving. Luther wanted people to read it, discuss it, even *argue* about it. That's part of being faithful. Part of our honoring God, loving God, and getting to “know” God deeply.

And we do that, it really starts to change OUR lives. We don't just call ourselves “Christians” and go about our lives – we get INVOLVED. And that is

Martin's Reformation #3: Saints AND Sinners in the Service

Involving *people* in “the church” and in worship

Not just the priests and “professional ministers”

When we read the Bible we find that we are all called to be “ministers” – reaching out, teaching, sharing, caring. This was huge. It was Different. It was Uncomfortable. **It is STILL uncomfortable.** It is also Liberating and empowering. To think that God calls each of us, every day, to serve and have purpose.

Martin Luther called upon “the church” – and the people – to change. To be “re-formed” – to be made fresh and renewed.

It didn't happen instantly. It wasn't easy. People didn't like change. They didn't like the challenge.

They liked being comfortable with how they had always been.

But then “reforms” are never easy. Reforming health care is not “easy”. Reforming a failing car company isn't easy. Reforming our piety, politics, policies and priorities is never easy. Reforming “the church” wasn't easy.

But it *starts with a decision to change something, or to change ourselves.*

I'm sure most of you have experienced something similar in your lives. Something that challenged and changed you – for the better. And that is exactly the question I'd like you to ponder for a minute or two.

Q1: How has your personal faith – or your relationship with God – been “re-formed”?
How has something you believe or understand about God changed?

(pause)

As you are willing, please take a moment to share these at your table with each other.

Q2: How has your LIFE been re-formed by God and your faith in God.
How have your priorities, your hopes, your habits been “re-formed”

(pause)

Again, as you are willing, please take a moment to share these at your table with each other.

Thank you for sharing from YOUR lives – your struggles, your victories, your “aha” moments.

Your own personal path of reformation.

Let me now ask you this – do you think that your life is “all done” and finished changing?
I didn't think so.

It is an ongoing, life-long process. We grow. We learn. We experience. We feel called and answer the call – or resist it. But the changing never ends, until our mortal lives are done.

God is never done “re-forming” our lives. Never.

God is never done “re-forming” the church. Never.

And for that we should be grateful, thankful and give praise to our Lord.

Because I don't really think any of us REALLY want to stay just as we are.

God promises to change us, re-form us. That is a promise made in LOVE.

To God be the Glory. Amen.