

Reformation Sunday
October 25, 2020
Cross of Glory Lutheran Church
Brooklyn Center, MN

PRELUDE

WELCOME

CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

Blessed be the holy Trinity, † one God, who creates, redeems, and sustains us and all of creation. **Amen.**

Let us confess our sin in the presence of God and of one another.

Faithful God, **have mercy on us. We confess that we are captive to sin and cannot free ourselves. We turn from your loving embrace and go our own ways. We judge others before examining ourselves. We place our own needs before the needs of our neighbors. Humble us, have mercy on us, and turn us again to life in you; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.**

God hears the cries of all who call out in need, and through his death and resurrection, Christ has made us his own. Hear the truth that God proclaims: Your sins are forgiven in the name of † Jesus Christ. Led by the Holy Spirit, live in freedom and newness to do God's work in the world. **Amen.**

GATHERING HYMN #504 A Mighty Fortress is Our God verses 1, 3 and 4

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| <p>1 A mighty fortress is our God,
a sword and shield victorious;
he breaks the cruel oppressor's rod
and wins salvation glorious.
The old satanic foe
has sworn to work us woe!
With craft and dreadful might
he arms himself to fight.
On earth he has no equal.</p> | <p>3 Though hordes of devils fill the land
all threat'ning to devour us,
we tremble not, unmoved we stand;
they cannot overpow'r us.
Let this world's tyrant rage;
in battle we'll engage!
His might is doomed to fail;
God's judgment must prevail!
One little word subdues him.</p> |
| <p>4 God's Word forever shall abide,
no thanks to foes, who fear it;
for God himself fights by our side
with weapons of the Spirit.
Were they to take our house,
goods, honor, child, or spouse,
though life be wrenched away,
they cannot win the day.
The kingdom's ours forever!</p> | |

GREETING

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. **And also with you.**

KYRIE

In peace, let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For the peace from above, and for our salvation, let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For the peace of the whole world, for the well-being of the Church of God, and for the unity of all, let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For this holy house, and for all who offer here their worship and praise, let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

Help, save, comfort, and defend us, gracious Lord.

Amen, amen.

HYMN OF PRAISE

Refrain: This is the feast of victory for our God. Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

Worthy is Christ, the Lamb who was slain, whose blood set us free to be people of God.

Power and riches, wisdom and strength, and honor and blessing and glory are his. *Refrain*

Sing with all the people of God, and join in the hymn of all creation: Blessing and honor, glory and might be to God and the Lamb forever. Amen. *Refrain*

For the Lamb who was slain has begun his reign. Alleluia. *Refrain*

PRAYER OF THE DAY

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Let us pray . . . **Almighty God, we thank you that your Holy Spirit renews the church in every age.**

Pour out your Spirit on your people now, and empower us to walk in the truth of your grace, which sets us free, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen

READING: Psalm 46

¹God is our refuge and strength,

a very present help in trouble.

²Therefore we will not fear, though the earth be moved,

and though the mountains shake in the depths of the sea;

³though its waters rage and foam,

and though the mountains tremble with its tumult.

⁴There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,

the holy habitation of the Most High.

⁵God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be shaken;

God shall help it at the break of day.

⁶The nations rage, and the kingdoms shake;

God speaks, and the earth melts away.

⁷The LORD of hosts is with us;

the God of Jacob is our stronghold.

⁸Come now, regard the works of the LORD,

what desolations God has brought upon the earth;

⁹behold the one who makes war to cease in all the world;

who breaks the bow, and shatters the spear, and burns the shields with fire.

¹⁰“Be still, then, and know that I am God;

I will be exalted among the nations; I will be exalted in the earth.”

¹¹The LORD of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our stronghold.
The Word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

SPECIAL MUSIC

Keith Williams

GOSPEL: John 8:31-36

The holy gospel according to St. John. **Glory to you, O Lord.**

³¹Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; ³²and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." ³³They answered him, "We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying, 'You will be made free'?"

³⁴Jesus answered them, "Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin.

³⁵The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there forever. ³⁶So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed."

The gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, O Christ.**

SERMON

Pastor Ali Tranvik

"What is truth?" It was my very first week of seminary and as I walked into one of my first classes, the teacher told us to get out a piece of paper and answer that question. "You have five minutes to write," she told us. "Go." And with that, I remember an awful sense of panic wash over me. I was always a pretty conscientious student. I wanted to do well. I wanted my teachers to like me. That first week of seminary was already pretty rough; I was feeling unqualified, inadequate, and fairly convinced I didn't belong. So you can imagine the horror I felt when my teacher asked us to answer this very loaded question, *"what is truth?"* As the timer began to tick, I tried to think of inspiring quotes about truth, Bible verses about truth, any truths about truth that I could put in writing, but nothing came to me. I tried to play the "guess what the teacher thinks the answer is" game, but it was the first week of class and I didn't know her yet, so that was pointless. At one point, I remember staring at my blank sheet of paper, and just writing the word "Jesus," but then I felt like a 5-year-old answering a children's sermon question, so I quickly erased it, assuming my teacher was after something a bit more complex than that. My initial panic turned to embarrassment and embarrassment into resignation that this would surely mark the end of my *very short* seminary career.

Luckily for me (or maybe unluckily for you) it didn't. But I do wonder: How would I respond to that question today? How would you respond to that question today? *What is truth?*

Today is Reformation Sunday. It's a day when we decorate the sanctuary in a festive red and sing "A Mighty Fortress is Our God." It's a day when we celebrate our Lutheran tradition, a tradition that began with a feisty monk named Martin whose infamous 95 theses reformed the church 503 years ago, an ever-reforming tradition that lives on in us today.

So maybe it's our tradition that I would point to if I were asked the question *"What is truth?"* today. That's what those in our gospel text from John did. They too cite their tradition as their source of truth. When Jesus tells them that "the truth will make them free," they tell Jesus that's impossible, because they're the descendants of Abraham, so they cannot be *made* free because they've never been enslaved to begin with. They're already free. They already know the truth. The truth is already given to them in their tradition, in the words of their holy scripture. But Jesus says, "If you continue in *my* word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." He continues: "Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there forever. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed" (8:31-36).

So *what is truth* according to today's gospel text? Jesus seems to present two truths in his words today: 1) the truth of our sin, which enslaves us, and 2) the truth of Jesus Christ, which sets us free.

On this Reformation Sunday, it's harder to get more Lutheran than that: the binding truth of our sin and the freeing truth of God's grace. Sin and grace. Grace and sin. This is the most fundamental and foundational "stuff" of our Lutheran life of faith. And while it's tempting to preach a Reformation sermon just on the grace part, as Lutherans we know that we can't really live in the truth of God's grace that frees us until we first confront the truth of sin that holds us captive. Grace means little if we think we don't really need it. The gift, in other words, isn't appreciated unless we realize both how undeserved and wonderful it is! That's why the very first thing we as Lutherans do in worship each week is confession, right? Before we can proclaim God's grace, we first must confront and confess our sin. In order to tell the truth about who God is, we must first tell the truth about who we are.

I want to tell you about an experience I had a few summers ago. I was in Germany as part of a seminary program that explored the Holocaust. We spent a few weeks traveling throughout the country, visiting concentration camps, museums, memorials—and I found myself stumbling. And I don't just mean figuratively (although that was certainly the case too). I mean I found myself *literally* tripping over something in the ground. The source of my stumbling, I soon learned, are called Stolpersteine, which is German for "stumbling stones" or "stumbling blocks." Stolpersteine are cobblestone-sized bronze plaques embedded in streets and sidewalks throughout Europe, each slightly raised from ground-level, and each engraved with the name and life dates of a Holocaust victim. As soon as I stumbled over a couple Stolpersteine, I began noticing them everywhere. I later learned that over 75,000 Stolpersteine have been placed in the pavement across more than 2,000 European cities and towns. These commemorative stones are part of an ongoing art project, installed at the last place each person either lived or worked before falling victim to Nazi crimes. Above each engraved name are the words "Hier Wohnte," meaning "here lived," serving as a reminder that this person did not build their life just anywhere, but right *here*, on *this* very ground.

As I continued to stumble over these Stolpersteine, and learned more about the people whose names were engraved on them, I stumbled over something else too: my German Lutheran forebears were complicit in their death. Growing up, I'd heard some vague references to hateful words that Martin Luther had said about his Jewish neighbors, but it was not until I began learning more about the Holocaust that I became aware of the antisemitism that continued to endure within the Lutheran tradition and helped enable the Holocaust. I was confronted by the sins of my beloved Lutheran tradition, by the truth of "things done" (some Lutherans actively supported the Nazis), and of "things left undone" (most Lutherans passively supported the Nazis through their silence, by turning away when their neighbors were being harmed and saying "it's not my problem" or "I have problems of my own to deal with"). I was confronted by the truth that at both state and church functions, a banner of the Luther rose was known to have hung beside a banner of a swastika. I was confronted by the truth that Luther, in his late treatise titled *On the Jews and Their Lies* recommended "set[ting] fire to synagogues [and Jewish] schools," so when Nazis burned and vandalized synagogues and Jewish homes across Germany in what became the infamous Kristallnacht or "night of broken glass"—the event that is often marked as the official beginning of the Holocaust—Nazi officials said "we are acting as Luther did." Over 100 Jews were killed that night, on what was the eve of the anniversary of Luther's birthday.

What is truth? The truth is that, as Jesus tells us in today's passage and as we confessed in our Lutheran liturgy at the start of this worship service: "We are captive to sin and cannot free ourselves." The truth is that we are sinners. Now, the "things we've done" likely do not compare to the sins of some of our Lutheran forebears, but I think that these uncomfortable truths of our tradition compel us to confront those things "we've left undone." They compel us to confront the ways we've turned inwards, turned away from our neighbors in need around us—yes, our Jewish

neighbors, but also our Muslim neighbors, our unsheltered, unemployed, uninsured, undocumented neighbors, our elderly neighbors, our sick neighbors, our imprisoned neighbors, any of our neighbors who are demonized or stigmatized or scapegoated. We may not have Stolpersteine to trip us up, but how are we called to confront our sins? How are we called to confession—not just as words in our liturgy but as a practice, as a way of being, in our lives?

I want to share a few more words from Martin Luther, a man who spoke horrible words of sin (as we heard a few minutes ago) and words of grace. Luther said, “Be a sinner and *sin boldly!*” These words may sound familiar (I have a beer glass at home with the words “sin boldly” printed on it). Often misinterpreted, this does not mean we should sin *so that* we earn God’s grace, nor does it mean we get a free pass to sin however we please. Rather, sin boldly is a statement of confession, for we cannot *but* sin. Sin boldly is a statement of truth-telling. But listen to the words Luther says next (usually these ones don’t make the beer glasses): He says “Sin boldly...but believe and rejoice in Christ even more boldly, for he is victorious over sin, death, and the world.” In other words, it is when we boldly confront the truth of our sin that we actually discover the truth of God’s grace. It is when we boldly confess that “we cannot free ourselves” (again, meaning that we both do things and fail to do things that enslave our neighbors, and that’s not a metaphor), it is when we boldly confess this, that are we actually set free *from* ourselves—and *for* our neighbor.

Living in the freedom of God’s grace is hard work. It’s what German Lutheran Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer—one of the Lutherans who resisted the Nazi regime—calls “costly grace.” Actually living not for ourselves but for others, Bonhoeffer insists, will be costly. It will be hard. It may lead us into places of pain and suffering. For Bonhoeffer, it led him to prison. For Bonhoeffer, costly grace ultimately cost him his earthly life.

But while grace may lead us into suffering, so too will it lead us into joy. While grace may lead us to places of death, so too will it lead us to life—to *life together*. Interestingly, Bonhoeffer recalls his days in Nazi prisons as some of the most joy-filled days of his life. Accompanied by fellow prisoners and criminals, Bonhoeffer writes: “The prisoner, the sick person, the Christian in exile sees in companionship of a fellow [brother or sister] a physical sign of the gracious presence of God...how inexhaustible are the riches that open up for those who [...] live in the daily fellowship of life with others.” Counterintuitively, the place that the world created to be a place of ultimate captivity was, for Bonhoeffer, a place of ultimate freedom. Paradoxically, the road that appeared to be “the end [of life], was also the beginning of life,” as Bonhoeffer himself wrote.

On this Reformation Sunday, as we remember both the sinful and grace-filled parts of our tradition, as we remember both the sinful and grace-filled parts of ourselves, we are called to confess these two truths that Jesus illustrates in our text from John: the truth of sin and the truth of grace. For it is in confessing our sin that we experience God’s grace. It is in giving up on “clinging to our own captivity” (Baldwin) that we are set free. It is in confronting the truth of who we are that we are confronted by the truth of who God is—a God who is abundantly gracious, insensibly loving, and who is still at work forgiving us and freeing us, renewing us and reforming us for the work (and the life) that lies ahead.

What is truth? “I am the way, the truth, the life,” Jesus says a few chapters later in John. It turns out, then, that the children’s sermon answer I had written and quickly erased that first week of class in seminary was actually right. Jesus—in short— *is* the truth. And this is a truth that is far more powerful than the truth of our sin. It is the truth, the Good News, that we Lutherans claim for Reformation Sunday—for this day and for every day. Thanks be to God. Amen!

Sources:

Baldwin, James. *The Fire Next Time* (New York: Random House, 1963).

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Life Together* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015).

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *The Cost of Discipleship* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015).

Martin Luther as cited in Hendrix, Scott. *Martin Luther: Visionary Reformer* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015).

Martin Luther. *The Freedom of a Christian* (1520), the Luther Study Edition, trans. Mark Tranvik (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008).

HYMN OF THE DAY #729 The Church of Christ in Every Age verses 1, 2, 3 and 5

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| <p>1 The church of Christ, in ev'ry age
beset by change, but Spirit-led,
must claim and test its heritage
and keep on rising from the dead.</p> <p>3 Then let the servant church arise,
a caring church that longs to be
a partner in Christ's sacrifice,
and clothed in Christ's humanity.</p> | <p>2 Across the world, across the street,
the victims of injustice cry
for shelter and for bread to eat,
and never live before they die.</p> <p>5 We have no mission but to serve
in full obedience to our Lord;
to care for all, without reserve,
and spread his liberating word.</p> |
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CONFESSION OF FAITH Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

OFFERTORY

Thank you for continuing to support and sustain the work of Cross of Glory during this time. Please send your offering to the church (5929 Brooklyn Blvd, Brooklyn Center, MN 55429), or contact Sue in the office to learn more about how to set up automatic, online giving. We are grateful for your generosity!

OFFERTORY RESPONSE Blameless

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| <p>1 What manner of love is this
That You would lay down Your life
You paid the price the sacrifice for redemption
Now I am determined to know
Christ and Him crucified
Now alive and the power in me is You</p> <p>2 I will boldly come
Running straight to the One
Singing over me Your songs of salvation
No one can take this from me
I'm a child that You name free
Nothing will separate us I'm held by You
Oh I know yes I know</p> | <p>Chorus (Now) (I'm) blameless You call me holy
I've been forgiven
You call me righteous I'm free
Now spotless You call me worthy
I am Your child
You call me chosen (I'm Yours)</p> <p>I am Yours I am Yours
I am Yours I am Yours</p> |
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OFFERING PRAYER

Blessed are you, O God, maker of all things. You have given us the gifts of your good creation. Nourish us at the tables we find ourselves today, and send us forth to set tables in the midst of a suffering world, through Jesus Christ, the bread of life. Amen.

PRAYERS of the PEOPLE

Set free by God's truth, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need...

God of all ages, just as you renewed, refreshed, and reformed the church 503 years ago, so too renew, refresh, and reform us now. On this Reformation Sunday and every day, open us to the ways your Spirit is leading and calling us, as we seek to be boldly and faithfully be the church in the world today. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of truth, guide us as we confess the truth of our sin--the sin of things we've done and of the things we've left undone. And set us free as we encounter the truth of your grace, that we would live for the sake of our neighbors in need. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of community, we give you thanks for the ministries of Cross of Glory--for its Council and staff, for its quilters and gardeners, for its worship leaders and Covid-19 task force members, for those who care for our building and those who hold this community in prayer. Bless the life together we share, even in this time apart. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of healing, be with those who are hurting today. For those struggling with their mental health, for those whose bodies ache, and for those whose spirits are weary. We pray especially for Gil Hartlage, Terry Stejskal, Vicky Jacobson, and for the son and daughter-in-law of Harriet Halvorsen. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of life, we remember the saints and sinners who have gone before us. Today we especially remember the families and friends of Aryls Puls, Bev Hoium, Clinton Nygard, Don Custer, and Lee Howe, the Vukelich family as they grieve the death of Bruce's cousin, and the Simon family as they grieve the death of Tom's cousin. Be with all those who mourn, O God, and remind us all of your promise of new life. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Though the earth should change, though the mountains shake, though the nations are in uproar, and though the kingdoms totter, we pray trusting in the name of the God of Jacob, our strength and our refuge. **Amen.**

LORD'S PRAYER

Gathered together as one by the Holy Spirit, let us pray the prayer Jesus taught us...

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

BLESSING

Mothering God, Father, + Son, and Holy Spirit, bless you and lead you into life. **Amen.**

SENDING FORTH SONG

Never Gonna Let Me Go

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|---|---------------|---|
| 1 Once I was lost wand'ring in darkness
No life inside no hope in sight
But He called my name and He healed my blindness
Set me ablaze now I'm alive with | Chorus | His love breaking through my heart of stone
Love breathing to awake my bones
Love reaching out to save my soul
Love never gonna let me go |
| 2 And now my heart so full of worship
I can't hold back no I can't contain it
For all He's done Jesus my Savior
I am ablaze and full of thanks for | Chorus | His love breaking through my heart of stone
Love breathing to awake my bones
Love reaching out to save my soul
Love never gonna let me go
Love calling me as I am
Love making me new again
Love lifting me when I can't
Love never gonna let me go |

Wherever you've been
Whatever you've done
Come as you are come into His open arms
Wherever you've been
Whatever you've done
(Come as you are come and find)
(Come as you are well come find His love)

Chorus Your love breaking through my heart of stone
Love breathing to awake my bones
Love reaching out to save my soul
Love never gonna let me go
Love calling me as I am
Love making me new again
Love lifting me when I can't
Love never gonna let me go
Love never gonna let me go
Your love never gonna let me go

DISMISSAL

Go in peace. Walk in the truth.

Thanks be to God.

The Order of Service is from Evangelical Lutheran Worship which is commended for use in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

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This Sunday, October 25th is Maggie and Gordy Johnsrud's 40th wedding anniversary. Congratulations and Happy Anniversary!

Community Announcements

- In lieu of Virtual Coffee Hour this week, we're kicking off "Table Talks," our new Adult Sunday School series. This month's gathering will serve as an introductory session and will last no more than one hour. All are welcome!
- Join us for CoG's Bible Study on Tuesday mornings at 9:30 am. We gather using the same Zoom info used for Sunday, so feel free to join us using a computer, tablet, or phone.
- All articles for November's Glory Banner--our church's newsletter--are due by Monday, Oct 26th to Sue at svukelich@crossofglory.us
- We occasionally have the joy of welcoming guest preachers into our pulpit, and next Sunday, we are excited that Liqing Chu will be joining us. Originally from Zhengzhou, China, Liqing is a graduate of Luther Seminary and candidate for ordination in the ELCA.
- Next week, we celebrate All Saints Sundays and remember all those who have passed away this year. During worship, we will read aloud the names deceased members and light a candle in their honor. As we grieve the many losses of this year, we invite you to share additional names of friends, family, or loved ones you're grieving and we will light a candle in their honor. Please share requests with Sue (763-533-8602) by Tues 10/27 at 10 am.
- If you have other announcements or pastoral care concerns or needs, Pastor Ali is available at atranvik@crossofglory.us or at 763-533-8602.