

October 30 2016

Psalm 32:1-7

Luke 19:1-10

**Sermon** *The Story Behind Reformation Sunday*

Today we are honoring Reformation Sunday. So what is Reformation Sunday? I know it isn't just about plaid and bagpipes but I didn't know much more about Reformation Sunday and its significance. I imagine there are others that are thinking the same thing. So I thought it would be good idea to have a history lesson.

On October 31, 1517, in the town of Wittenberg, Germany, Martin Luther posted on the door of the Castle Church his ninety-five theses.

Martin Luther was an Augustinian monk, doctor of theology, and a resident of Wittenberg. He is considered by Protestants to have rediscovered the fundamental tenants of Christian faith, which set the stage for a confrontation within the Church that led to the Protestant Reformation.

By the time of the fall of Rome, in the late 5<sup>th</sup> century, the Church had already adopted many practices contrary to the teachings of Christ. The one practice that was the catalyst that caused Luther to directly confront these issues was the Church practice of granting "indulgences". It was an attempt to sell salvation. If a person committed a sin, he could in a sense buy his way to heaven by making a contribution to the church either with money or a charitable act. This was in direct conflict of the words of the Bible according to Luther. Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone, and good works result from our faith.

The Church perceived Luther to be in opposition to Papal authority and sought to have him arrested. However, with the support of the faculty at Wittenberg University and the Elector, Prince Frederick III of Saxony, Luther avoided imprisonment and most likely a trial that would have ended in execution. By 1520, however, he was excommunicated from the Church and labeled as a heretic and fugitive.

The reaction of the Church against Luther and its steadfast refusal to discuss his theses prompted an internal schism that eventually became the Reformation movement. By 1530, the division was set, and an official statement of faith, known as the Augsburg Confession, began the first Protestant Church.

The revival of the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith has become the cornerstone by which the modern church exists. Reformation Day honors the work of the Holy Spirit in individuals who step out and confront the evils of their day through faith. From Luther's time to the present, the Church has been in a near-

constant state of reformation, as the Lord continually restores the teachings and gifts that He blessed the Church with at its birth on Pentecost.

I have to admit that I didn't know this is why there are Catholic churches and Protestant churches. Now I have a somewhat better understanding of the history of how Christian churches have evolved but it does spark a curiosity to learn more.

So, let us go from learning about Reformation to learning more about our scripture reading in Luke. It is the story of Zacchaeus that I spoke to the children about. He is a chief tax-collector and he hears about Jesus coming into Jericho. Being of short stature, he climbs a tree to be able to see Jesus coming. I can relate to how he felt. Being a short person, it seems that no matter what is going on, if you aren't in the front, you can't see anything. If you aren't trying to get in the front, you are told you must be in the front like for photo ops. As Jesus comes by, he looks up and see Zacchaeus in the tree and calls him by name, saying "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down: for I must stay at your house today."

Zacchaeus was happy to welcome Jesus to his home so he hurried down out of the tree. Of course, as soon as others saw that Jesus was going to the home of a tax collector, which I have likened to a vulture, the grumbling is started. How could Jesus go to the home of a sinner? Hearing the grumbings, Zacchaeus tells the Lord that he will give half of his possessions to the poor and if there is anyone that he has defrauded he will pay them back 4 times as much. Jesus says to Zacchaeus that "today salvation has come to this house because he too is a son of Abraham."

Now if you were listening to the story of Reformation Sunday, you may wonder if Zacchaeus was trying to buy his way to heaven when he says he will give half his possessions to the poor. I think not. Zacchaeus knew that just by the fact that Jesus picked him and his family to be Jesus's host for the day that he and his family had been blessed. This encounter with Jesus transformed his life and he became more concerned about others.

In conclusion, remember the saying "To reach the fruit of the tree, you must go out on a limb." That is what Zacchaeus did. He was curious about who Jesus was, so when he heard that Jesus was coming into Jericho, he did what he had to do to be able to see Jesus as he came into town. He didn't let his stature, his profession, or anything stop him from seeing Jesus. Because of that, Jesus seeks him out and, as a result, Zacchaeus and his family were blessed with the love of Christ.

We need to do the same. We need to let nothing stop us from seeing Jesus and believing in the blessings we will receive if we have faith and believe in Him.

As a p.s. to my message, make sure you read the insert in today's bulletin. The story of Zacchaeus continues. Amen.