

Reformation Sunday [Reformation Sunday]
October 27, 2019
Haven Lutheran Church Hagerstown MD
Readings: Jeremiah 31: 31-34; Psalm 46; Ephesians 3: 1-10; John 8: 31-36

Pittsburgh City Council passed a special resolution Tuesday. It proclaimed October 27th will now be “Remember, Repair, Together” Day in Pittsburgh. A year ago, a fellow American, a white supremacist came into the Tree of Life building in Pittsburgh, which housed three congregations. He murdered eleven people and seriously wounded others who were attending Sabbath services in their synagogue. “Remember, Repair, Together” Day. The Jewish community of Pittsburgh is sponsoring a commemoration that will include community service projects, Torah studies and a memorial service. ALL people, Jewish or non-Jewish, are welcome to participate. “Remember, Repair, Together” It is not only remembering those who died but remembering that the bigotry and hatred that killed them is not yet dead and still needs to be combated. “Remember, Repair, Together” is not about pointing fingers but claiming the vocabulary, attitudes, biases within and among us that keep us divided, fearful and volatile. “Remember, Repair, Together” is a declaration of hope, that the same concern and compassion that brings us together after a tragedy can keep us together to repair our broken hearts, spirits and communities if we but remember how much better it is when we work together rather than separate into “us” and “them.”

“Remember, Repair, Together” It is an ever so appropriate a theme for Reformation Sunday. I do not mean to take away from what all that it actually represents for the people of Pittsburgh and the greater Jewish community. Yet “Remember, Repair, Together,” isn’t that what Martin Luther intended back in 1517 when he posted that list of flawed practices on the door of the Wittenberg church? Luther was looking for discussion and honest debate. He wanted the church to *remember* its foundation in Holy Scriptures and the saving work of Jesus. He hoped the church would rally to *repair* itself, rid it of corrupt practices and adopt life-giving practices in their place. Luther was calling for church leaders to work *together* for the sake of all the church, for the sake of God’s mission and the spiritual lives of each member.

It didn’t work out the way Martin Luther had hoped. He never wanted division in the Christian church. Still we return each Reformation Sunday to “Remember, Repair, Together.” We listen again to Luther’s call for the church to remember to stay rooted in the truth revealed in Jesus and the Holy Scriptures. He calls us to continually reflect and repair so together we can give flesh, feet, hands and voice to the saving message and mission of Christ in our time and place. “Remember, Repair, Together.” You see, on this side of

eternity, we are never done reforming... Or more precisely, we are never done being reformed by the Lord we proclaim, the Lord who dares to claim us.

“If you continue in my word, “Jesus said, “you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” “Knowing the truth means knowing Jesus Christ. It is relational knowledge, trust in a person rather than belief in a set of ideas [a doctrine or creed.] We can study a person’s teachings and know all about their life, their habits, and their history, but that doesn’t mean we know the person. To know them we have to spend time with them, listen to them, and share ourselves with them.... Believers become disciples by remaining with Jesus, staying in relationship with him, and letting his words and his presence challenge and change us.”¹

Many of the changes Martin Luther brought into the church were meant for that very purpose — to allow the average person to get to know the Lord. He wrote hymns and translated the Bible and the words of the worship service into the language of the people. He did it so they could hear God’s truth and love first hand and have their own encounter with the Lord. He wrote the small catechism so families together would teach, learn and grow in their understanding of God and discipleship. The Protestant Reformation reminded the church that Christianity was never meant to be a spectator sport. Christianity has always been a contact sport, where each person and the community keep intentionally bumping into the truth called Jesus. “Remember, Repair, Together” “When we listen to Jesus and trust him to name our sin and free us from it, he transforms our lives [and churches]. He invites believers to know him so deeply that his truth sinks into our very being. He calls us to embody his truth in our lives [and churches], so that we walk his way of love in the world. He is the Son who shows us how to find our home in God.”²

What are we to “Remember, Repair Together” this Reformation Sunday? Perhaps we begin by thinking of our own relationship with the truth called Jesus. Do we use those religious practices Luther and others fought so hard for us to have? Are we spectators or in contact with our Lord? Do we seek to deepen our relationship with Jesus through the reading or study of the Bible, daily devotions or prayer, regular worship and serving our neighbor? Those aren’t words to cultivate guilt but inspire an awakening. We Lutherans do not usually speak of having a relationship with God. It may be a new or uncomfortable idea for you. But I can tell you that reading from the devotional booklet every day, whether you feel like it or not, have the time or not WILL do something in your heart and faith. I can tell you that talking to Jesus throughout your day, including gratitude, anxieties, wonders or challenges WILL change you. It’s not about perfection; it’s about stepping beyond doctrine, moving away from the sideline to have an active, engaging relationship with our Lord, the

truth. We are not saved by such actions, nor get extra points in heaven for them. God does the saving willingly and loves us always. How else to respond to such a gift than by getting to know the One who could be so generous and forgiving?

Beyond our personal relationship with our Lord, Reformation Sunday speaks “Remember, Repair, Together” to our church community, too. Like most churches today we are trying to figure out how to be God’s church in a world many of us can hardly recognize, among a majority of people who have never regularly attended a church and know nothing about Christianity beyond what they see in the media ---- God help us. It is time for another Reformation moment perhaps. “Remember, Repair, Together” “Remember” does not mean nostalgia for the past or trying to make it what it was 40 years ago. “Remember” means go back to Scripture, look to Jesus, recall the mission of transforming love to which we have been called. “Repair” doesn’t mean fix the church so it can merely survive but continually, earnestly seek how to witness, spread the word, be the church in this time and circumstances no matter how baffling or difficult it may seem. Reform is a word of warning — Beware of being so comfortable with the familiar that you ignore God’s Spirit moving in different and new members and ideas. Many a welcoming and friendly church has tripped itself up when people only talk to friends and don’t invite someone different to come to events... or when people forget to ask everyone around the committee table what they think or forget to call back people who have offered to help. We are an ever-reforming church and community. “Remember Repair Together” We remain mindful of hurtful pitfalls and open to meaningful corrections so that we can stay true to the truth, the ways of Christ and the life-giving Spirit that will lead us in right pathways.

Reformation Sunday is also a day to remember to celebrate the church that has somehow survived us flawed and faltering humans. We celebrate all those who remembered it is God’s church... those who were open to hear God’s Spirit calling them to repair and return to God’s truth. We celebrate that by God’s grace, we ARE together, doing good things and caring for one another and our neighbors. But most of all, on Reformation Sunday, we give thanks to the Lord who helps us to “Remember Repair Together. “May we always be reformed and always keep reforming, for the sake of the Gospel, for the sake of each other, and for the sake of our world.”³ Amen. Linda M Alessandri 10/26/19

ENDNOTES

1. Judith Jones, "Commentary on John 8:31-36" as posted on www.workingpreacher.org, 2019

2. Ibid

3. Brandan Robertson, "We Need Reformation" (A Sermon for Reformation Day), OCTOBER 26, 2015 posted at <https://www.patheos.com>