

Bobble Heads
Reformation Sunday (A)
John 8.31-36

Pastor Kelly K. Faulstich
Grace Lutheran Church
October 30, 2011

Given our proximity to Wrigley Field,
I suspect the color that many of you are wearing this morning
is not in celebration of last week's World Series outcome.
Although, there are some of you with connections to St. Louis
who may have in fact been rooting for the Cardinals.
I confess I don't know St. Louis baseball all that well,
but the Cards probably have a song that their fans know and love.

I know Take Me Out to The Ballgame and Go Cubs Go.
I know the fight song of my college, not all the words, but some and the tune.
I know the song that gets played at the United Center when the Hawks score.
Familiar music for special occasions...we have a few hymns of that sort this morning.

Wednesday in the Cornerstones Bible Study, I led us in a different song:
I like Martin Luther, do you like Martin Luther?
I think the Reformation's grand.
He broke the church to pieces,
When he nailed the 95 Theses,
Good ol' Martin Luther,
He's our man!

The nearing of All Saints Day in our church calendar,
Leads more to the reason we're surrounded by this bright crimson hue this morning.
Our bulletin covers,
the banners overhead,
the vestments and other clothing we wear...
This morning the red is because it's Reformation Sunday, of course.
May the Spirit that came on Pentecost continue to lead the Church, we pray.

And while many of our liturgical Christian counterparts remain in the color green,
Part of our gathering this morning,
is about remembering and giving thanks for a movement and its leaders from long, long ago.

For some, the story of the Lutheran Reformation might be as familiar as, say, the Christmas story.
Where instead of shepherds and angels and King Herod,
We think of Luther and Calvin and other reformers
and Johann Tetzel, the indulgence salesman and Pope Leo the Tenth.

Last week in chapel, our fifth grade students wove together some of Luther's hymns with the history of the Lutheran Reformation. I thought what they did struck a fabulous balance of Lutheran pride and humility grounded in Christ.

With pictures that they drew projected on this wall, with prayers they wrote, and introductions to hymns, they pointed us to that monk and priest, that scholar and writer, named Martin, who read his bible, studied the scriptures and looked around at the sixteenth century church with some confusion.

We need not pay for forgiveness in the form of indulgence letters.
Brother Martin argued, citing crucifixion, resurrection, Romans and other epistles.
The people should be able to read the bible.
Martin thought, so when he was hidden away from those who might harm him,
he translated from the Greek and the Hebrew and the Latin that was available into German.
Pastors should know what they're teaching and families should be educated in the faith.
Martin wrote the Large and Small Catechisms for clergy and layfolk to study.

Of course, there are other pieces to the Reformation:
princes and politics and printing presses,

all these contributing in some way to the success and struggle of the non-Roman church in that day.

The reason this Reformation Day pops up at the end of October is because on October 31, in 1517,
Martin nailed his list of 95 theses, 95 statements about the church and how it was in need of reform
on the door of the church in Wittenberg.

We might know October 31st for other reasons,
But in a time and place where Halloween was not a part of the religious or secular culture, All Saints Day was.
And Martin knew that the people who would all be coming to church on All Saints Day
on November 1st,
would see what he had written.

And so, on this last Sunday in October,
we give thanks for the reformers of old and the reformers of our own time.
We remember our shared history,
whether Lutheran from the womb or visiting a Lutheran church for the first time today.

When I was in fourth grade Sunday School, my mother asked the class what Sunday was approaching at the end of
October. I knew it began with an R and ended with a tion. And so I raised my hand and offered the answer of “Recreation
Sunday.” My mother sighed and kindly corrected me, “Reformation Sunday, Kelly.” I’m sure she’ll remind me again this
evening when we talk, like we do every Sunday. But there’s something to my slip-up.

With the “I like Martin Luther” song (and there’s many more verses), with Saint/Sinner t-shirts some of our high schoolers
are wearing this morning, with the color red and with Martin and Katie Von Bora, his wife, bobble heads, there can be an
element of playfulness that comes, an element of recreation in our celebration of Reformation.

The events of the Lutheran, the greater Protestant, and the counter-Catholic Reformations are important, our saved-by-
grace-through-faith heritage is central to how we (and others in various denominations) experience and express our faith
as community. Our turning to the holy scriptures, employing a lens of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection remains of
highest importance.

Without any playfulness on this day of Reformation though,
we might risk thinking that being Lutheran or celebrating Luther
is more important than being freed by Jesus.

In our gospel this morning, we hear
“We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone,”
the Jews who believed in Jesus began.
It’s refreshing for me to know
that even people two thousand years ago
forgot to remember that the good ol’ days weren’t always good.

Descendants of Abraham,
through Isaac and Rebekah,
through Jacob and Rachel and Leah and Zilpah and Bilhah and the many sons,
these descendants of Abraham eventually ended up in Egypt.

You might remember what happened next,
as the book of Genesis concludes and the Book of Exodus picks up:
slavery in Egypt, oppression and struggle,
than wandering around the wilderness for forty years.

So, “We have never been slaves to anyone” isn’t exactly accurate here.

But what does Jesus do?
How does Jesus handle this selective memory and its generation of a question?

Jesus reminds them who they are because of who he is.
They can do because of what he will do.
“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.”

If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.

On Reformation Sunday, on the something Sunday after Pentecost, in Lent, in Advent, in Christmas,
what Jesus did, what God does and continues to do,
always takes center stage in worship, in ministry, and hopefully in all we do.

Jesus, Son of God, dies for the sin of the world, that we may be free from sin.
In baptism, God calls us God’s children, giving us place in the household God keeps.

We are freed from sin, we are named as God’s children,
but it doesn’t end with Good Friday or Easter Sunday or the last Sunday in October.
Jesus reconciles us with God *and* Jesus sends those who follow him to serve in the world, to glorify God.

Freed from sin, thanks be to God.
But also freed to serve.

This is where it gets sticky for us Lutherans sometimes.
We are **not** made right, justified with God through our works.
But because through Jesus, we have been reconciled with God, we respond.

We are saints *and* sinners,
Lords of all *and* servants of all,
Freed from sin *and* freed to serve.

Luther never wanted those who followed in the ways of his reforms to be identified by his name,
It’s all about Jesus, he taught, it’s all about Christ’s outpouring of love for the world on the cross.

Brothers and sisters, it is good to be playful together.
It is good to rejoice in our traditions and
to be thankful for the men and women who have taught us in the faith.

And indeed, I hope this coming week comes with both play and rejoicing in your lives.
But this Reformation morning and this coming week, let us remember who frees us, who sends us,
who names us in the waters of baptism and who feeds us at this table.

In play and in study,
In work and in rest,
To God be all the glory. Amen.