

Order of Service for October 25, 2020 - Reformation Sunday

GATHERING

Gathering Song - 847, Come, Let Us Join Our Cheerful Songs

Come, let us join our cheerful songs with angels round the throne;
ten thousand thousand are their tongues, but all their joys are one.

"Worthy the Lamb that died," they cry, "to be exalted thus!"

"Worthy the Lamb," our lips reply, "for he was slain for us!"

Jesus is worthy to receive honour and pow'r divine;
and blessings, more than we can give, be, Lord, forever thine.

Let all creation join in one to bless the sacred name
of God who sits upon the throne, and to adore the Lamb!

(Hymn lyrics printed under CCLI Licence # 11411292)

Greeting

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

C -And also with you.

Kyrie

P - Loving Creator, you have designed all of creation to grow, to change. May we embrace re-
formation Lord, have mercy.

C - Lord, have mercy.

P - Loving Saviour, you come to point us in new directions: away from self, toward the Other.
May we embrace re-formation. Christ, have mercy.

C - Christ, have mercy.

P - Loving Spirit, you fill us with yourself to guide us to yourself. May we embrace re-
formation. Lord, have mercy.

C - Lord, have mercy.

Prayer of the Day

P - The Lord is with us. Let us pray. Almighty God, gracious Lord, we thank you that your
Holy Spirit renews the church in every age. Pour out your Holy Spirit on your faithful people.
Keep them steadfast in your holy word, protect and comfort them in times of trial, defend them
against the enemies of the gospel, and give to your church your saving peace, through Jesus
Christ, our Saviour and Lord. Amen.

WORD

Hebrew Scriptures

Deuteronomy 34:1-12

Then Moses went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo, to the top of Pisgah,
which is opposite Jericho, and the LORD showed him the whole land: Gilead as far as Dan, all
Naphtali, the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the Western Sea,
the Negeb, and the Plain -- that is, the valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees -- as far as Zoar.
The LORD said to him, "This is the land of which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob,

saying, 'I will give it to your descendants'; I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not cross over there."

Then Moses, the servant of the LORD, died there in the land of Moab, at the Lord's command. He was buried in a valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth-peor, but no one knows his burial place to this day. Moses was one hundred twenty years old when he died; his sight was unimpaired and his vigour had not abated.

The word of the Lord.

Psalm 90:1-8, 13-17

Christian Scriptures 1st Thessalonians 2:1-8

Gospel Reading John 15:1-5

Jesus said to his disciples, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing."

Sermon

There is a social theory floating around out there which says that human life goes in roughly 500 year cycles. It's not that it's planned that way. It's not that someone says, "Hey, it's been 500 years since the last 'big thing'; I think I'll invent the next 'big thing.'" No one has that kind of power or control.

Nor is it only one thing that happens that somehow affects everything else. We all know that life is a spider's web of interconnectedness anyway, so it's never just one thing. It's always a bunch of things that add up.

But social theorists, as they look back on human life, can see this as a trend. And for the last couple decades, these folks have been saying, "Get ready for the next 'big thing.'"

For those of us of European decent, the Reformation, which we remember today, was the last '500 year big thing.' And today, as we commemorate that last 'big thing,' we again tell the story of how Martin Luther stood up to Emperors and Popes, how he translated the Bible into the language of the people, how he taught people what true faith was about through his Small Catechism, how he changed the church into what we now have.

Yea, Luther!

But we do the people who lived during those tumultuous times, and ourselves, a major disservice if we *only* remember Martin Luther not backing down; if we *only* celebrate his translating the Bible; if we *only* recite Luther's "This is most certainly true"; if we *only* pat ourselves on the back for having these things as part of our heritage. If we fall into this narrow focus for this day, we are really missing the point.

The Reformation was not only centred on one person (Martin Luther), was not only one event (the posting of the 95 Theses), was not only located in one country (Germany), did not only have one effect (restoring the gospel), and did not impact only one religious organization (the church).

In fact, historians aren't even calling that time "The Reformation" anymore! They are calling it "The ReformationS." They are now talking about the multiple changes, multiple people, multiple perspectives that arose during that era. They are not taking anything away

from Luther by doing this. They are instead placing him in his appropriate contexts. There were a whole bunch of things going on the 14- and 1500s, and they all had their impact.

They had their own technological revolution, because 40-odd years before Luther was born, Johannes Gutenberg developed Europe's first printing press with moveable type. Luther wasn't around when it started, but he sure took advantage of it! So did his friends. So did his enemies. And so did everybody else.

They had their own politicians scrambling for power. They had an Emperor ruling an empire in the middle of Europe which wasn't really an empire. They had people in this non-empire called Electors, whose job it was to elect a new Emperor for the non-empire when the old one died. They were rulers of kingdoms which were part of this non-empire, who frequently did not listen to the Emperor whom they had elected when they didn't want to, or when it didn't suit them. And there were literally hundreds of other, minor rulers under them, who also paid attention when it was convenient, and who didn't when it wasn't.

They had economic powers which were jockeying for position. They had their rich families, of course, and bankers and such. But they also had merchant and craft guilds: leather workers, weavers, gold smiths. Pretty much every profession had its own guild, which worked to protect their members from competition, provided support when times were tough, and who were angling for a share of political power as well.

It's also hard to over-emphasize the effects of the Plague on that time period. Somewhere between 30 and 40% of the population of Europe died in less than 5 years, which, as you can imagine, caused *massive* dislocation of pretty much everyone and pretty much *everything*. Granted, this began over 130 years before Luther was born, but it wasn't finished by his time; there were outbreaks of the Black Death for centuries before and after Luther's life.

There was the church. It had insinuated itself into pretty much every part of European life, from the personal to the political, and everything in between. It was a power; it was corrupt; it had, to a great extent, lost its way.

And, of course, there were the ordinary people: most living under grinding poverty, virtual slaves to the powers that be, and being told *by* the powers that be that it was God's will that they be where they were, and any attempt to change the status quo was rebellion against God.

It is crucial for us to remember *all* of these things when we remember Luther's Reformation, because all of these things were re-formed during that time. Religion, yes, but also politics, economics, technology, social interactions, education, philosophy.... *Every part of life* was changed, which is why historians call this time "The Reformation^S," and why social theorists call that time period the last '500 year big thing.'

Now, as much as I might like it, I don't have a crystal ball! I don't know if today's social theorists are right, and that the next '500 year big thing' is just around the corner, or has perhaps already started. We'll all have to get together in 2120, and look back at the last 100 years to be able to tell!

But let's be honest. It *does* seem possible that we are in the next '500 year big thing.'

Our technology has been changing at a crazy pace for the last number of decades. Remember when fax machines were a big deal? Remember how big and clunky the original cel-phones were? We've moved past those things! I had a conversation on my computer with a friend a couple weeks ago, and she and her husband were riding down the highway in their self-driving car!

Our politicians are also scrambling for power. We just finished a municipal election which has resulted in a very different political landscape locally. But with a minority government in Ottawa, the possibility of another Canadian election is always there. And we are also aware of the election taking place in the U.S. which has the potential to change things across the globe. Dramatically.

Our economics are in flux. The wealthiest 1% in Canada control over a quarter of all wealth in the country. And if we expand our perspective, the 8 richest people in the world control the same amount of wealth as the bottom almost 4 billion people. This is not sustainable. And we also have groups of people doing everything they can, within and outside the law, to protect their status, and who are portraying anyone who sees things differently as a threat which must be destroyed.

Of course, we have our own pandemic which has been such a huge part of our lives for the last several months. Granted it is nowhere *near* as deadly as the Black Death was in the middle ages, but no one knows where it's going, or how long it will last, or what mutations may occur, or what the long term effects are going to be. What we *do* know is that it has disrupted our lives *significantly*. And it will continue to disrupt things for the foreseeable future, which is increasing the general level of anxiety of *all* of us.

And we know from our own lived experience of being the church in this time and place that the religious landscape is radically different from what it was, even a couple decades ago. St. John's by the Sea in Feltzen South has closed and sold its building, St. Matthew's in Rose Bay will be closing at the end of the year, Zion is having a meeting today to look at its own financial realities.

These are not just the trends that sociologists look at. These things form our lived reality, right here.

So. Are we in the next '500 year big thing'? I don't know, but it sure seems possible. If nothing else, we might be in the beginning stages of it.

Which means, we have a challenge; not just individually, but as the church. How do we proclaim Good News in this mixed up, volatile, and even dangerous situation?

There is no one, easy answer. But there is something we can do: We engage with what is happening. We don't hide from it (we can't, anyway!). We don't pretend that it's all an outside problem, and as long as we can stay in our building, or our little religious bubble, we'll be safe. And we *especially* don't pretend it's only one thing, as if we can solve one problem or one political issue, and everything will be fine again.

We need to engage, with the whole crazy ball of wax. We need to be in touch:

- in touch with people;
- in touch with technology;
- in touch with politicians, local and distant;
- in touch with how tax structures work, or don't work;
- in touch with people whose history and identity are being attacked, yet again;
- in touch with minorities, whether that be racial, cultural, religious, or any other group;
- in touch with the almost 4 billion people who individually can do almost nothing, but who together can counter balance the obscenely wealthy.

Living in a '500 year big thing' is hard! We will not escape unscathed. As the gospel reading puts it, we will have some of our cherished branches pruned. Maybe even a trunk or two. We will not be the same on the other side.

But that's what it means to be re-formed. And as the church of the Reformation^S, we also know that being re-formed leads us to life, new life, a kind of life that we couldn't have imagined before.

Just like Moses on Mount Nebo, looking over the Promised Land, we might not see the end of the journey.

But the promise of God is there. We will not go through the next '500 year big thing' alone. God walks with us. Indeed, God may very well be taking us *into* the next '500 year big thing'! But even in the middle of the Reformation^S which are happening around us, and *to* us, and *in* us, because it is God who takes us, we can go in hope.

Which is really the whole point of Luther's particular Reformation!

Thanks be to God. Amen.

RESPONSE TO THE WORD

Hymn of the Day - 720, We Are Called

Come! Live in the light! Shine with the joy and the love of the Lord!

We are called to be light for the kingdom, to live in the freedom of the city of God!

Refrain

We are called to act with justice. We are called to love tenderly.

We are called to serve one another, to walk humbly with God.

Come! Open your heart! Show your mercy to all those in fear!

We are called to be hope for the hopeless,

so all hatred and blindness will be no more! *Refrain*

Sing! Sing a new song! Sing of that great day when all will be one!

God will reign and we'll walk with each other

as sisters and brothers united in love! *Refrain*

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Prayers of the People

A - As we commemorate the Reformation this year, we do so in a time of pandemic. With the ecumenical and global family, we bring our prayers for healing. And we join with our sisters and brothers of other communions in joint service to the neighbor, in restraint and vigilance, and in shared witness. Let us now pray for the world, the church and all those in need.

[Short pause]

A - God of mercy, throughout history your goodness prevails. Open the hearts of all people to discover the deep bond of community. Show us your mercy!

C - Hear our prayer!

A - God of peace, bend that which is inflexible, the identity barriers that divide, the attachments that thwart reconciliation. Bring peace in this world, especially in Syria, Armenia, and between Settlers and Indigenous people in Nova Scotia. Restore wholeness among us. Show us your mercy!

C - Hear our prayer!

A - God, our healer, come to our aid as COVID-19 continues to spread. Heal those who are sick, protect families and friends from being infected, support those in public health and medical services. Strengthen our resolve to address the root causes of malaria, dengue and HIV. Show us your mercy!

C - Hear our prayer!

A - God of justice, hasten justice for those suffering under the power of evil and every form of oppression and greed. Give new life to all. Show us your mercy!

C - Hear our prayer!

A - God, rock and fortress, protect refugees, those without homes or security, and all the abandoned children. Help us always to defend human rights and dignity. Show us your mercy!

C - Hear our prayer!

A - God creator, all creation groans in expectation. Convert us from being exploiters. Teach us to live in harmony with your creation. Show us your mercy!

C - Hear our prayer!

A - God of mercy, strengthen and protect those who are persecuted for faith of any kind. Give us the courage to stand with them. Show us your mercy!

C - Hear our prayer!

A - God of life, heal painful memories, transform complacency and indifference, inspire and sustain our ecumenical journey from conflict to communion. Sustain us as branches on the one vine, Jesus Christ. Show us your mercy!

C - Hear our prayer!

A - God our sustenance, bring us together at your eucharistic table. Turn us to you and one another. Nurture within and among us a communion rooted in your love. Show us your mercy!

C - Hear our prayer!

P - Into your hands we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

C - Amen.

Lord's Prayer

P - And now we pray as Jesus continues to teach us:

C - Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial, and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.

SENDING

Benediction

P - May almighty God,
The Father who created us to live in love,
The Son (†) who died and rose to bring us new life,
And the Spirit who is re-forming even *us*,

bless us all, now and forever.

C - Amen.

Sending Song - 546, To Be Your Presence

To be your presence is our mission here,
to show compassion's face and list'ning ear,
to be your heart of mercy ever near. Alleluia!

To be your presence is our mission bold,
to feed the poor and shelter homeless cold,
to be your hands of justice, right uphold. Alleluia!

To be your presence is our mission blest,
to speak for all the broken and oppressed,
to be your voice of hope, your love expressed. Alleluia!

We are your heart, O Christ, your hands and voice,
to serve your people is our call and choice,
and in this mission we, the church, rejoice. Alleluia!

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Dismissal

P - Go in peace. Embracing re-formation.

C - Thanks be to God!