

YEAR A - THE YEAR OF MATTHEW

THE HOLY GOSPEL

REFORMATION SUNDAY OCTOBER 30, 2011

The Holy Gospel is according to St. John the 8th Chapter.

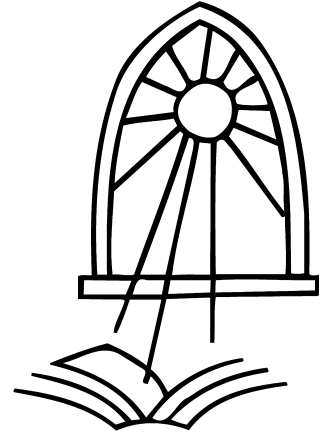
Glory to you, O Lord.

Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; [32] and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." [33] They 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'?"

[34] Jesus answered them, "Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. [35] The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there forever. [36] So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.



Sermon - October 30, 2011

Year A - Year of Matthew - Reformation

Jeremiah 31:31-34; Psalm 46; Romans 3:19-28; John 8:31-36

Four hundred and ninety four years ago, in 1517 a young priest and professor by the name of Martin Luther posted on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany, a list of 95 theses, or statements, requesting a debate on the substance of these 95 theses.

At the time, Martin Luther had no idea what drastic changes this simple act would bring upon the church, but posting those 95 Theses began a chain reaction that resulted in the events that we know today as the Reformation

So, who was Martin Luther? Back in 1999 as we prepared for the turn of the century, there was a list of people considered to be the most influential people of the past millennium. They are:

1. Guttenberg, for his invention of the movable-type printing press that made book readily available and affordable for the first time.

2. Isaac Newton for his work in science, physics, and astronomy

3. Martin Luther, who brought religion and education to the common people, and is credited for laying the foundation of democracy.

So, who was Martin Luther? Well, what happened on that day when Luther posted the 95 Theses was simply the culmination of a long, personal struggle that had been fermenting within Luther's soul and spirit for several years.

Martin Luther grew up in a day and age when the church pictured God as an angry, vindictive God. He was perceived as a God of wrath and punishment who watched over us, anxiously waiting for us to make a mistake so that God could then punish us with eternal suffering in hell. The church taught people to fear God in the worst sense of the word.

The church used that fear to control the people; and that fear was used to amass tremendous wealth and power. In those days, the Church and the state were so intertwined, that it had a corrupting influence on the Church. It was a corruption we would now have difficulty imagining today in any church. However, in the medieval world, this was the way of life and faith.

As a young man, Luther wanted to make himself right and pleasing before God. To do so, he did the following:

- He left a promising future in law school

- He became an Augustinian monk.

- He was ordained as a priest in the Church.

- Later, he earned his Ph.D. in Bible and Theology.

- Eventually he became a professor at the University of Wittenberg in Germany, one of the new and upcoming schools of the Church.

However, through all of this, Luther did not find what he wanted the most. He longed and searched for peace with God. No matter how hard he tried to be obedient to the commands of God and the Church, he knew that he was still a sinner. Consequently, he could only see himself as condemned before God.

He reasoned, "God is holy and just. I am a poor, miserable sinner, no matter how hard I try. How can a holy God possibly love a sinner like me?"

Luther was more honest with himself than most of us are today. We tend to belittle and minimize our sins. We act as if our sins make no difference to God. Luther saw his sin for what it really was; he saw it as that which separated him from God.

One day as Luther was preparing for a series of lectures on Paul's letter to the Romans, he was reading and studying chapter three, a portion of Scripture that he had surely read many times before.

However, this time as he read it, his eyes were opened, and the light came on! As

Luther describes it, "It was as though the gates of heaven were opened to me!"

He read from Romans 3:19-28:

But now, apart from law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed...since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified (put right with God) by God's grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.... For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law.

In our Gospel reading today, Jesus said, "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free!" Suddenly, Luther knew the truth of the Gospel, and Luther was set free! He was set free from trying to make himself worthy and acceptable before God. He was free to simply rest in the grace, favor and love of God. Grace and forgiveness are freely given to us because of what Jesus Christ accomplished for us on the cross of Calvary.

Luther rediscovered the Gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ. It had been there right in front of his eyes all along, but it had been hidden, obscured, covered by centuries of misuse and tradition in the Church.

The truth of that Gospel is that we are not saved or put right with God by what we do. We are saved solely by the love and grace of God freely and generously given to us through the death and resurrection of Christ. Salvation comes to us as a free gift of God's grace.

With this new-found discovery of the Gospel, Luther was eager to share it with the world. He thought that he would find a ready audience, but instead he was met with resistance and persecution. The people loved what Luther taught. They come for miles to hear him preach because he spoke in a way and of things they had not heard before. He put the liturgy into the language of the people so they could understand the worship.

However, the church leaders branded Luther as a heretic and outlaw and tried everything they possibly could to suppress his teaching.

However, Luther was the right man for the right time. He was empowered by the Holy Spirit, and armed with the truth of the Gospel and the Word of God. There is no greater power than the Word of God. Luther discovered the true and radical nature of God's grace, and he proclaimed it.

The faith does not say that God does not care how we live. Certainly God desires very deeply that we stay close to God and that we live lives of honesty, integrity, and obedience to God's will.

We do not save ourselves, Jesus Christ saves us! That is the Gospel! That's the Good News that sets us free. We are saved by the grace of God through faith and trust in Jesus Christ.

On reformation Sunday it is good to know some things about Martin Luther and the history of the Reformation. However, it is more important to know what the Reformation proclaimed for us.

God loves us

By the grace of God through Jesus Christ, you are forgiven and made a child of God,

We might leave here truly knowing the joy of your salvation.

As Martin Luther read the Scriptures, he discovered the Gospel, and, as he put it, the "gates of heaven" opened to him. As children of the Reformation, may we know that same assurance of God's love and grace, and may heaven be opened for us! Thanks be to God! Amen.