

***Reformation Faith --- Surprised By The Word Of God
Psalm 119:33-40 & Hebrews 3:1-6***

“Christ, however, was faithful over God's house as a son, and we are his house if we hold firm the confidence and the pride that belong to hope.” Hebrews 3:6

Today is Reformation Sunday. Reformation Sunday is the day when we remember the trials and tribulations of the men and women who had faith and passion for God and God’s Word. On October 31, 1517, a young, Catholic priest by the name of Martin Luther nailed his 95 statements on the door of the Wittenberg Castle. He never planned to establish a new church. Martin Luther had a passion for God and wanted that passion to reform the Catholic Church. The call of the Reformation was “Sola Scriptura --- Scripture Alone, Sola Fide --- Faith Alone, and Sola Gratia --- Grace Alone.” This morning I would like for us to take a brief look at the life and ministry of Martin Luther. One of the great discoveries of the reformation, especially for Martin Luther, was the Word of God. Luther, in his preface to his 1539 Works, wrote these words about Psalm 119, “In this Psalm (119) David always says that he will speak, think, talk, hear, read day and night and constantly --- but nothing else than God’s Word and Commandments. For God wants to give you His Spirit only through the external Word,”¹

May we listen, hear, speak, think, and talk every day and night what the Word of God teaches. Our Old Testament lesson comes from Psalm 119 verses 33-40 and our New Testament Lesson comes from the book of Hebrews chapter 3 verses 1-6. As the writer of Hebrews says may we consider Jesus when we hear these words.

Psalm 119:33-40

33. *Teach me, O Lord, the way of your statutes, and I will observe it to the end.*
34. *Give me understanding, that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart.*
35. *Lead me in the path of your commandments, for I delight in it.*
36. *Turn my heart to your decrees, and not to selfish gain.*
37. *Turn my eyes from looking at vanities; give me life in your ways.*
38. *Confirm to your servant your promise, which is for those who fear you.*
39. *Turn away the disgrace that I dread, for your ordinances are good.*
40. *See, I have longed for your precepts; in your righteousness give me life.*

Hebrews 3:1-6

Therefore, brothers and sisters, holy partners in a heavenly calling, consider that Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, 2.was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses also "was faithful in all God's house." 3. Yet Jesus is worthy of more glory than Moses, just as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself. 4. For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God. 5. Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that would be spoken later. 6. Christ, however, was faithful over God's house as a son, and we are his house if we hold firm the confidence and the pride that belong to hope.

Martin Luther was born November 10, 1483, in Eisleben, Germany, to a copper miner. His father wanted him to enter the legal profession, so Luther went to school to study. In 1502, at the

age of nineteen, he received his first Bachelor's degree ranking unimpressively 30th of 57 in his class. Three years later, January of 1505, he received his Masters of Arts at Erfurt and ranked second among seventeen candidates; that summer Martin Luther had a Damascus-road experience. On July 2, 1506, Luther was caught in a terrible thunderstorm and was hurled to the ground by lightening. He feared for his soul and he cried out to God to save him. While he was lying on the ground, he told God that if God saved him he would become a monk. Fifteen days later, to the regrets of his father, he entered the gates of an Augustinian Monastery. Luther was 23 when he became an Augustinian monk. A year later, on Easter Sunday, he was ordained to the priesthood. On October 19, 1512, at the age of 28 Luther received his Doctor's degree in theology and as given the chair of Biblical Theology at the University of Wittenberg, which Luther held the rest of his life.

This is Reformation Sunday! What can we learn from Martin Luther? What can we learn from the Presbyterian Church on Reformation? The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church is called the *Book of Order* and it states these words in Chapter two, "The Church and Its Confessions." "*Yet the Church in obedience to Jesus Christ, is open to the reform of its standards of doctrine as well as governance. The church affirms 'Ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda.' That is 'The church reformed, always reforming,' according to the Word of God and the call of the Spirit.*"²

REFORMED AND ALWAYS REFORMING --- ACCORDING TO THE WORD OF GOD AND THE CALL OF THE SPIRIT! Wow! What a cry of reformation. Those words are similar to the words of Martin Luther "Sola Scriptura --- Sola Fide --- Sola Gratia"—scripture, faith and grace alone.

Wouldn't it be great to be a part of another reformation in our world? Wouldn't it be great to be a part of a reformation right here in this church --- in our lives and our homes? Reformed and always reforming according to the Word of God and the call of the Spirit.

We can start a reformation! We can be reformed by the Incarnate Word, External Word and the Indwelling Word! ***The Incarnate Word ---Christ made flesh. The External Word --- the Scriptures. The Indwelling Word—Christ, the living word, alive in us!***

THE INCARANTE WORD

The Incarnate Word is Christ made flesh. In the Gospel of John we are told, "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*" (John 1:1) The incarnation of Christ reformed the world! It started in the villages of Bethlehem and Nazareth, to Jerusalem, Judea and the ends of the earth.

The people of the Hmar tribe of northeast India were once fierce headhunters, infamous for their vicious slayings. But in 1910, Welsh missionary Watkin Roberts sent the Gospel of John to a Hmar chief. The chief invited Roberts to come and explain the Scriptures, and within two generations the entire Hmar tribe was evangelized. Soon after, the British government expelled Roberts from India, but his efforts continued to produce fruit. Today the Hmar tribe totals over 1 million people. Rochunga and Mawii Pudaite are a very small part of that tribe, but they are continuing Roberts's vision in a big way.

In 1971, God gave the couple a dream: to give a free copy of the New Testament to all the families of the world. They founded *Bibles for the World* ministries, and have since sent more than 16 million copies of the New Testament, translated in the appropriate local language, into homes all across the globe.³

The living Word—Jesus Christ--becoming flesh and blood--in the lives of people will always cause a reformation. Our New Testament reading from the book of Hebrews took me by surprise this past week as I was studying the passage. One word in verse one stopped me in my tracks. The word is “consider.” The writer tells us, “*Therefore, brothers and sisters, holy partners in a heavenly calling, consider that Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession.*” The term “consider” comes from the Greek word “katanoeo” which implies attention and continuous observation. The idea is for us to “put your mind on Jesus and let it remain there, that you may understand who He is and what He wills.”

The question this morning is: are we looking for a reformation in our life? Then “CONSIDER” Jesus! Turn your eyes, your heart, your mind upon Jesus and remain there, so that you may truly understand the Incarnate Word that became flesh and dwelt among us. In so doing, a reformation will happen and we will understand who Jesus is and what God’s will is for us. The Incarnate Word—the living Jesus, made flesh and dwelling among us.

EXTERNAL WORD

In 1539, commenting on Psalm 119, Luther wrote, “In this psalm David always says that he will speak, think, talk, hear, read, day and night and constantly --- but about nothing else than God’s Word and Commandments. For God wants to give you His Spirit only through the external word.”⁴ This phrase is extremely important. The “external Word” is the Bible—our Scriptures! And the saving, sanctifying, illuminating Spirit of God comes to us through the “external Word.” Luther calls it the “external Word” to emphasize that it is objective, fixed, outside ourselves, and unchanging. It is external like God! You can take it or leave it but you cannot make it other than what it is. The Bible is a book with fixed letters, words and sentences. Luther said with resounding forcefulness in 1545, the year before he died, “Let the man who would hear God speak, read Holy Scripture.”⁵

Are you looking for a reformation in your life? Do you want to hear God speak to you? Luther has the answer for us, read the Holy Scriptures.

Luther was driven by a passion for exaltation of God in the Word. In one of his prayers he says, “Dear Lord God, I want to preach so that you are glorified. I want to speak of you, praise you, praise your name. Although I probably cannot make it turn out well, won’t YOU make it turn out well?”⁶

Luther was a professor, but he was also a preacher. In the church that he served in Wittenberg, they had no church programs, only worship and preaching. On Sundays they had three worship services: the 5:00 A.M. worship with the sermon on the Epistles, the 10:00 A.M. worship with a sermon on the Gospels and the afternoon message on the Old Testament. Monday and Tuesday sermons were on the Catechism, Wednesdays on Matthew, Thursday and Fridays on the Apostle’s Letters, and Saturday on John. Between 1510 and 1546, Luther preached

approximately 3000 sermons in those 36 years. In 1528 alone, he preached almost 200 sermons. Yet in the midst of all his teaching and preaching, he committed himself to read through the Bible twice every year. In 1533 Luther penned these words, “For a number of years I have now annually read through the Bible twice. If the Bible were a large, mighty tree and all its words were little branches, I have tapped at all the branches, eager to know what was there and what it had to offer.”⁷

If the External Word were a tree with many branches, how many have you tapped upon? I would encourage you to read through the Bible in a year. I have a friend that listens to the Bible on CD as he is driving to work, and another friend who listens to the Bible on CD as she gets ready in the morning. If you are not sure where to start, there are all kinds of reading plans, let me know and I will give you one. Let the External Word reform your life!

INDWELLING WORD

I told the Band of Brothers this past week that one of my dreams has been that I would be a part of a revival, that I would be able to see a reformation. My greatest joy in life is to see someone’s life transformed by the love of Christ. One of my favorite Scripture verses comes from Paul’s letter to the Colossians, Paul puts it this way ***“To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”*** Christ in you is the hope of glory! The writer of Hebrews says ***“we are his house if we hold firm the confidence and the pride that belong to hope.”***

Have you ever considered that you are God’s house? It is Christ in you that is the hope of glory. If a reformation is going to take place in our lives, it first comes by considering the Incarnate Word! If a reformation is going to take place in our church and in our homes, schools and places of business, it will happen because we, as followers of the Incarnate Word, are spending time in the External Word! When we take the Incarnate Word and the External Word, a huge reformation begins in us. The Indwelling Word begins to shape and mold us, changing us from the inside out. Psalm 1 challenges us to be like a tree planted by a river, letting the Incarnate, External word become the branches of our lives, indwelling us with the living word—Jesus Christ!

SO WHAT!

What do these ancient words have to say to us today in 2007? The Psalmist says:

Teach me, O Lord, the way of your statutes, and I will observe it to the end.

Give me understanding, that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart.

Lead me in the path of your commandments, for I delight in it.

Turn my heart to your decrees, and not to selfish gain.

Turn my eyes from looking at vanities; give me life in your ways.

Confirm to your servant your promise, which is for those who fear you.

Turn away the disgrace that I dread, for your ordinances are good.

See, I have longed for your precepts; in your righteousness give me life.

I would like to close with the last words of an African Pastor who was martyred for his faith. This piece is called “The Fellowship of the Unashamed.”

Fellowship of the Unashamed
(The last words of an African martyr)

"I am part of the fellowship of the unashamed. The die has been cast. I have stepped over the line. The decision has been made. I am a disciple of Jesus Christ.

I won't look back, let up, slow down, back away, or be still. My past is redeemed, my present makes sense, and my future is secure.

I'm finished and done with low living, sight-walking, small planning, smooth knees, colorless dreams, tame visions, mundane talking, cheap giving, and dwarfed goals. My pace is set, my gait is fast, my goal is heaven, my road is narrow, my way is rough, my companions few, my Guide reliable, my mission clear.

I won't give up, back up, let up, or shut up until I've preached up, prayed up, paid up, stored up, and stayed up for the cause of Christ.

I must go until He returns, give until I drop, preach until all know, and work until He comes. And when He comes, He will have no problem recognizing me. My colors will be clear. "For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ."⁸

What does it mean for us to celebrate Reformation Day today? What does it mean to us to be reformed and always reforming according to Word of God and the call of the Spirit?

This Reformation Day, may we consider Jesus --- look intently on Him --- put your mind on Jesus and let it remain there, that we may understand who He is and what God wills.

This Reformation Day, take the External Word and commit ourselves to reading the Bible daily -- allowing God to speak to us.

This Reformation Day, join "The Fellowship of the Unashamed" and allow the Christ in us to be our hope of glory. We are God's house --- "***hold firm the confidence and the pride that belong to hope.***"

Christ—the Incarnate Word—is the Solid Rock upon whom we stand. The Bible is the external word that metamorphasizes into the indwelling word inside us when we tap into its many branches!

The cry of Luther's heart as he posted those 95 questions on the door of the Wittenberg Castle was: Scripture alone, faith alone, grace alone. May each of us today echo the cry of the Reformation and may we each become part of a reformation in our life time. May today be only the beginning as we allow the word-made-flesh to dwell forever in our hearts. Happy Reformation Sunday, may we be reformed and always reforming—according to the Word of God and the call of the Spirit in our lives.

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¹ Ewald M Plass, compiler, *What Luther Says: An Anthology*, St Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959

² The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA), published by the Office of the General Assembly

³ *Quick Takes --- The Headhunter's Children*, Today's Christian, Jan/Feb 2005

⁴ Ewald M Plass, compiler, *What Luther Says: An Anthology*, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Fred Meuser, *Luther The Preacher*, Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1981

⁷ Heiko Oberman, *Luther, Man Between God and The Devil*, New York: Doubleday, 1992

⁸ Extreme Devotion, Voice of the Martyrs, page 150