

SERMON

+ Reformation Sunday (Pentecost 20)

October 26, 2025

100th Congregational Anniversary year

For us Lutherans,
Reformation has long been a day for heritage –
our roots, our family history, as it were,
the foundation of who we are.
And in this 100th anniversary year of our congregation,
we have spent more than the usual attention
on our own heritage and history.

The Pharisees in our gospel reading warn us
that it's important to remember our heritage,
and more importantly, what that heritage is.

They claim, “We are descendants of Abraham
and have never been slaves to anyone.”
Which seems to completely forget
that the very essence of their identity and faith
is that they are a people saved by God through Moses
from slavery in Egypt.

So, it's important to be clear
about just what our reformation heritage really is.
Because, see, the Protestant Reformation
that claims its beginning in Martin Luther posting 95 Theses
to the church door in Wittenberg
is not the foundation of who we are,
though it has come to play a significant role in our history and identity
and how we've celebrated that.

Honestly, for a vast majority of our over 500 year history,
we Lutherans did a pretty good job
of defining ourselves precisely
along those Reformation lines,
defining ourselves by whatever was not Catholic,
and using celebrations of the Reformation
to boast in our own identity and bash the other guys.

But that's not who we are.
And fortunately, we've gotten over that.

Neither is the core of our heritage
the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther, himself.
We owe him a lot, to be sure,
and his role as a saint of the church of Christ
has been radical and historical,
enduring and far-reaching.

But he is more like John the Baptist.
He proclaims Christ,
he paves the way for Christ,
he draws our attention to Christ,
but he is not the Christ.

Our heritage is the Lord Jesus Christ,
whom Luther so adamantly insisted we root our lives in,
the Savior he so fervently desired to live in our hearts,
the Son of God who forms us as his community –
the community Luther insisted was not “Lutheran,”
though he didn't get his way in that case,
but the community comprised of our neighbor to love
as obedient disciples of that one Lord Jesus.

The essence, the core, the foundation
of who we are – our heritage –
is our abiding relationship and trust in the one Lord Jesus,
who is the Truth of God
and the very Word of God in human flesh present with us.

Our heritage is his cross, the instrument of his death
and our baptism into that death.
Our heritage is his resurrection
and by it, our salvation and his promise of life
beyond the suffering, pain, death, and sin
of this world and our time in it.

Our heritage is that living Lord,
 the scriptures that testify to him,
 and the sacraments that make him present for us
 and pour out his grace on us.

When we look at the core of us,
 our roots, the foundation of us,
 we look to our Lord Jesus, the Son of God our creator
 and the Holy Spirit who calls, guides, and guards us
 in the true faith, trust in Christ,
 and love of God and neighbor.
 That is the reformation Luther led us to.

But as I reflect on anniversaries and think of our heritage,
 I immediately also turn my thoughts to our legacy – our future –
 and the continuing reformation of the church.
 Because, as one commentator has said,
 “Two things the church must be organized to do:
 assure responsible transmission of the tradition
 from one generation to another,
 and be open to the winds of the Spirit
 by which the tradition can come alive.”

(Barbara Lundblad, “October 29, 2017, Reformation Sunday: From a Preacher,”
Sundays and Seasons Preaching, Year A 2017)

When we live our lives in trust, faith, and love,
 rooted in the life, command, death and resurrection of Jesus,
 we have tremendous freedom in the Spirit
 in all other things.
 Knowing the truth sets us free.

If we, like Luther, plant ourselves firmly in our foundation –
 center ourselves attentively on our core –
 then we can ask ourselves,
 Where will that take us?
 What will we do now?
 Where will the Spirit lead us?
 How can we and how should we reform the church today?

We have tremendous freedom to ask, for ourselves,
 How do we live out our life of faith
 in our world today?
 How do we live as faithful and obedient disciples
 in this place and time?

Because it's a very different world than Luther's world.
 It's a very different time than Luther's time.

We live in a world where the Christian faith
 is just one option among many
 that demands our time, shapes our thinking,
 and defines our priorities.

So, how do you see the church
 witnessing to the mercy, forgiveness,
 love, and grace of God in Christ
 to our world of vengeance, power,
 division, and demand?

Your response to that – our response to that –
 the Holy Spirit's movement in us in that
 is how the church will continue to reform.
 In this age. And in every age.

As long as we root ourselves
 in a relationship of trust
 with the Word who is Jesus,
 the Truth who is Jesus,
 and the freedom which is the disciple's life,
 then we can ask that question
 and reform ourselves and the church
 in whatever way we can and must
 in order to be witnesses to the God of life,
 the Father of our Lord Jesus,
 and the power of the Holy Spirit
 alive and active in this world

in this day.

Because at the core,
that is who we are.
Our heritage. And our legacy.