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St. Paul's Lutheran Church  
2100 16<sup>th</sup> Street SW  
Austin, MN 55912-1749  
Pastor Ted Barthels  
Sermon preached on  
October 29, 2017  
Reformation Sunday

Scripture Lessons: 2 Chron. 34:1-3,18-19, 29-33, John 8:31-36  
Hymns: 224; 260; 261; 774

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord  
and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Hebrews 13:7-9

“Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of  
God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of *their*  
conduct. <sup>8</sup>Jesus Christ *is* the same yesterday, today, and forever.  
<sup>9</sup>Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines. For *it*  
*is* good that the heart be established by grace, not with foods which  
have not profited those who have been occupied with them.”  
(NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.  
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Why a Reformation Sunday?

Tuesday is Reformation Day. Most people will be observing the  
day as Halloween. It is also the Eve of All Saints Days, or All  
Hallowed Eve. It is a day for children to run around our  
neighborhoods saying, “trick or treat?” and collecting huge bags of  
candy. Harmless enough, I suppose. I drove my children around  
some when they were young and let them have some fun too. Some  
Christians are more concerned about the day becoming a  
celebration of witchcraft and other evil customs, and so prefer to

keep their children home, or have an observance at church or with other friends that observes more of the Reformation theme.

I have been told that some even object to that, taking a position that we shouldn't give so much attention to Martin Luther because it detracts from Christ. Indeed that would be the last thing Martin Luther would have wanted. In fact he thought it more than strange that some began to call themselves "Lutherans" while he was alive, and preferred the term "Christian." So it is good for us to think about "Why?" Why should we observe the Reformation, especially on this 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Luther posting the 95 Theses. It shouldn't be about Luther that we should praise him, we do need to be careful about that. However we do benefit from learning from about him, in fact I believe the Lord encourages such an examination of believers who have lived before us.

In our text this morning the Holy Spirit led the writer to the Hebrews to encourage them to remember those who had taught them and led them in the Scriptures. While we live 500 years after Luther began the Reformation in Germany we still learn so much of the truth of God's word from Luther, and still benefit from the example Luther presents us for living in a world which oppresses and opposes the truth of our salvation. Our text declares the truth about Christ as the eternal God; **"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever."** (v.8) Martin Luther found his comfort, his joy, his peace in Christ. In all his preaching, teaching and writing Martin Luther was about directing others to the eternal Christ who does not change. So, to the praise and glory of Jesus, let us spend a few minutes on this Reformation Sunday--

### **THEME: Remembering Martin Luther.**

In our text the Holy Spirit encourages these Hebrew Christians to remember those who rule over them, **who spoke the Word of God to them.** It is obvious that the Lord does endow called servants with some authority to minister and guide other Christians in faith and life. If this was a reference to only the apostles the Spirit would have designated the apostles. This is a broader exhortation. One might suggest that we are stretching it a bit to include Martin Luther in the exhortation since Luther hasn't "ruled" over anyone for almost five centuries. But then let us remember the Spirit's qualifying clause, **"who have spoken the Word of God to you."**

Indeed it is especially appropriate for us to remember Martin Luther for this very thing;

## I. For Speaking the Word of God for Us to Hear 500 Years Later.

The Word of God was key to the Reformation because it became the absolute authority for Luther's faith, and therefore also for his confidence of personal salvation, and therefore the foundation authority for all that Luther taught and wrote. Earlier in his life Luther had lived under such a cloud of guilt that he perceived God, and even God's Son, our Lord Jesus Christ as a tyrannical judge who knew little mercy, but demanded perfect righteousness. Luther was unable to find any comfort in any assurances of forgiveness he received from others because the authority for that forgiveness came from man, and the foundation of that forgiveness was said to be Luther's own merit. Luther knew he had no merit. Luther was weighed down by the guilt of his sin. However, as he read and poured over the Scriptures he found passage after passage concerning the righteousness of God, passages with which Luther struggled until he came to the realization by the Holy Spirit opening his eyes to the gospel that the righteousness of God was not something Luther had to achieve in order to receive forgiveness. Rather it was the righteousness which God had secured for Luther and all people in Jesus that was freely given by grace through faith in Christ Jesus. **"The just shall live by faith!"**

This gracious righteousness of God is only revealed in the gospel of a crucified and risen Savior. This righteousness was secured first by Jesus own perfect and sinless life, and then also by Jesus' sufferings and death on the cross as the atoning sacrifice for our sins. This message of God's righteousness being revealed to a sinful mankind in order to save sinful mankind is found only in Holy Scripture. The church had lost sight of what the Apostle Paul had written to Timothy. Paul exhorted Timothy: **"You must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned *them*,<sup>15</sup> and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."** (2 Timothy 3:14-15) The wisdom that saves is revealed in the Scriptures. That is the way it was for Paul

and Timothy, and that is what the Spirit impressed upon the heart of Martin Luther. This was the truth that Luther was compelled by the Spirit to proclaim in sermons and written tracts, in the confessions and in Luther's Catechisms. Just as it was not Luther's righteousness that saved, so it was not Luther's wisdom, or any human wisdom that conceived the plan, and fulfilled the plan and secured our salvation. It is God's wisdom revealed in God's Word.

So then the authority of God's Word became the supreme authority in Luther's mind, and quite correctly so, for it is the supreme authority for both faith and life. We are not to base our teaching on human reason, or popular opinion, or current social trends, or the authority of any man or church council. There was a lot of that going on in Luther's day. There is a lot of that going on today. In fact people have been misled into believing that "Whatever I think is true is true because I 'think' it! It's MY truth, and nobody can tell me otherwise." It is not only church officials or councils that set themselves above the Word of God; politicians and scientists and philosophers do so also. From there it is only a small step to conclude, "If they can I guess anyone can!" NO! That's foolishness we wouldn't entertain for a moment in engineering the construction of a bridge, but too many do accept such foolishness for something far more difficult, impacting many more lives, man's eternal salvation.

The **authority** for faith and life is in the Word of God! So Paul declared plainly to Timothy immediately following the words we already cited. Paul wrote:

**2 Timothy 3:16-17** "All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,<sup>17</sup> that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."

Luther came to understand this truth and would not budge from the authority of the Word of God, not before Eck, not before Zwingli, not before Emperor Charles. He held to the authority of the Word of God.

Luther therefore realized how important it was for people to be able to read the Bible, to own their own Bible, to know what the

Bible says. Our bulletin cover pictures a cover of one of the editions of Luther's translation of the Bible into German. In Luther's day many thought people couldn't be trusted with the Bible, but Luther didn't see it that way. Now we all own our own Bible's, maybe even several of them, so we can read them any time we might desire, at our ease. One can even pull up the Scriptures on line on your smart phone. How blessed we are!

And so we remember Martin Luther for bringing that important lesson back to prominence. He taught us the Word, the Lord led Luther to the Word so that Luther would bring us the Word.

Our text also encourages Christians to follow the faith of those who ruled over them and brought them the Word. So as we observe this special anniversary we pray that the Spirit would lead us --

## **II. To Follow Luther's Faith.**

This exhortation for the Hebrew Christians was so important because their faith was under duress, being constantly challenged. They were threatened with reprisals for adhering to the gospel. Indeed they suffered persecution. Earlier in this same epistle the holy writer encouraged them to keep Jesus ever before them saying, "**looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.**" (Hebrews 12:2) They were also encouraged to watch those who taught them the Word using their example for perseverance in faith, and understanding the end of their faith. Yes, even those who died in persecution could be a rich encouragement for Christians struggling with persecution because of the perseverance in faith of other martyrs looking to Jesus for strength and support.

Luther is an example of perseverance in faith for us to follow. There were many trials and tribulations in Luther's life. He endured sickness for himself, as well as the loss of two of his children. There were also the continual threats of Pope and Emperor hanging over his head, accompanying the demands that he retract his teachings of the gospel. Luther turned to the Lord for help in time of need. He did not see himself as strong as we may be inclined to attribute such strength to him. Seeing his own weakness

Luther found strength in the Lord. Luther's faith in the Lord to save him extended out to the trials and persecutions that came against Luther in daily life. In faith Luther continued to serve the Lord, proclaiming the gospel. More than once Luther was heard to exclaim to his friend and companion Philip Melancton, "Philip, let us sing the 46<sup>th</sup> psalm," which of course was the basis for Luther's best known hymn, "*A Mighty Fortress is our God.*" He had every confidence in God to care for him and protect him from every evil. That was Luther's prayer. That was Luther's faith. By the Spirit's blessing that became Luther's life. Luther wrote and sang:

**“With might of ours cannot be done, Soon were the loss effected;  
But for us fights the Valiant One, Whom God Himself elected.  
Ask ye, Who is this? Jesus Christ it is, of Sabaoth Lord,  
And there's none other God; He holds the field forever”**

(The Lutheran Hymnal 262:2).

That was the faith of Martin Luther, and the outcome of that faith was eternal life. On Luther's deathbed he confidently committed his soul into God's hand knowing the eternal life that awaited him with Jesus.

That is the faith we may use as our example, along with many others, a host now arrayed in white. We do this clinging to the truth of Holy Scripture, not giving the false doctrines so popular in our day a place in our hearts but holding fast to the confession of our faith without wavering. Martin Luther followed Jesus' counsel which we read in our gospel lesson, to abide in Jesus' Word, and to know thereby the truth that sets us free. (John 8:31, 32).

So then on this Sunday which we have set aside for an observance of the Reformation let us give to God praise and glory for the blessings that He imparted to His Church in Martin Luther. Let us praise the Lord for the knowledge that Luther shared with us especially in His catechisms which presented so clearly the truth about our God and Savior Jesus Christ as revealed in the holy and inspired Word of God.

Learning of the joy that took possession of Luther's heart through faith in that gospel may we be inspired in our lives to live in that hope, that joy, that peace of believing that shows our beloved Savior to all in the world around us.

**AMEN.**

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.