

## Sermon for REFORMATION NIGHT 2017

Grace and peace to you all from our risen Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

The text for our short address tonight is Genesis 3:1b: “**Has God really said...**”

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

On October 31, 1517, Martin Luther nailed his Ninety-Five Theses to the door of the castle church in Wittenberg. Luther didn't intend to start anything other than a spirited debate on the Power and Efficacy of indulgences, but God had other plans.

Europe was a powder keg ready to blow and these Ninety-Five Theses lit the fuse. When an enterprising printer read the Ninety-Five Theses he realised their power. He translated them from the original Latin into German and published them. They spread through Germany like wild fire. It didn't take long for other printers to translate them into other languages and spread them through the rest of Europe. The rest, as they say, is history.

For many people, the word reformation more or less means the same thing as “change.” They see the Christian life as a life of constant change - a life of always becoming something new. Such people are constantly trying to reinvent the church - make it more exciting - make it more marketable - make it more cutting edge. Such people misunderstand the true meaning of the word reformation.

The root of the word reformation is the word “reform.” Reform simply means to take something that is wrong and make it right. When we talk about the reformation of the church, we are talking about someone or something that

corrects the errors of the church. The reformation of the church is an attempt to put the church back on the right track.

When we properly understand the meaning of the word reformation, we realise that the true Reformation of the Church began a long time before Martin Luther was even born. In fact, the Reformation of the Church began a long time before Jesus Christ was born. The true Reformation of the Church began only a short time after God created the world.

When God created the world, there was no need for reformation - everything was perfect. Adam and Eve were the only members of the only congregation that was ever perfect. Unfortunately, the perfection of that little congregation of two didn't last.

We all know the story. Satan inhabited the serpent and seduced the members of that little congregation away from their relationship with God. The congregation fell into sin and there has never been a perfect congregation ever since. From that time forward, every congregation has sought to wander away from God and His Word. Every congregation needs continuous reformation.

Genesis 3:15 tells us when God first revealed the focal point of that reformation to the church. While He was proclaiming the punishment that the serpent had earned, He said, *"I shall make you and the woman hostile to each other, and I shall make your descendants and her Descendant hostile to each other. He will crush your head, and you will crush His heel."* With these words God made the first promise of a Saviour and began to offer salvation to sinners. That salvation comes through faith in the woman's Descendant, the One who would crush the serpent's head.

Since then, Satan has made it his business to entice people away from that faith. He works primarily by trying to separate God's people from God's promise - from God's Word. He whispers in man's ear: **"Has God really said..."** If we are not in a state of constant reformation - a constant return to the Word of God - Satan will gain the upper hand. God must continually reform His people because Satan is continually trying to deform them. This reformation has continued down through the ages to this very day.

There are numerous reformations mentioned in the Scriptures – let's take a look at a few of them.

Some 1600 years after creation, God send a flood. The reformation in Noah's day was very sad. For one hundred years Noah preached about the coming

destruction. Think about the ridicule he endured from the people. *“Noah, is it you alone who is wise? Is it you alone who pleases God? Are all the rest of us in error? Shall we all be condemned? Is it you alone who is not in error? Is it you alone who will not be condemned?”* [Luther’s Works, Vol. 2]. The people in Noah’s day refused to understand that Noah’s warnings were not his word, but the Word of God. In the end, this reformation produced a righteous congregation of eight people and the flood destroyed the rest.

The book of 2 Kings tells of a wicked king of Judah named Amon. During his reign the temple fell into disrepair and the Book of the Law fell out of memory. No one studied God’s Word and Satan had his way with the people of Judah.

When Amon died, his son Josiah began to reign at the age of eight. Josiah was a good king and the reformation became strong during his reign. He ordered the repair of the temple and when he was twelve years old, the workers found the Book of the Law. *When the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, he tore his clothes. The king commanded Hilkiah the priest, and Ahikam the son of Shaphan, and Achbor the son of Micaiah, and Shaphan the secretary, and Asaiah the king’s servant, saying, “Go, inquire of the LORD for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that has been found. For great is the wrath of the LORD that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us,”* (2 Kings 22:11-13). The reformation continued to correct the wandering of God’s people during the reign of Josiah.

As the time of the Messiah drew near, another reformer appeared on the scene. He called attention to those who misused and abused the Word of God in order to oppress the people and increase their own standing in the community. He called them vipers which is the same as saying that they were the seed of Satan, the ancient serpent. He called them to repent and be baptised. When he saw the Messiah, he said, *“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is He of whom I said, ‘After me comes a Man who ranks before me, because He was before me,’”* (John 1:29). Even though the reformation was energetic during the ministry of John the Baptist, many still did not believe. Many continued to wander.

These are just a few of the milestone events of the continuous reformation of the Church - the continuous fight against our sinful desire to wander away from God - the fight that began in Eden and continues to this very day.

How does it show up today? It really shows up the same way that it always has. When Satan wanted to tempt Adam and Eve, he began his temptation with the words, “**Has God really said...**” This is the way he begins every temptation. He must first drive a wedge of doubt between us and God’s Word. Satan knows that he can have his way with us if he can cause us to wander away from God’s Word. He also knows that God’s Word can be a powerful weapon against him.

In fact, we can often tell how the battle will go by the status of God’s Word. When Satan tempted Adam and Eve, they dropped their only weapon, God’s Word, and they fell. When Satan tempted Jesus, Jesus relied on God’s Word and He crushed Satan. When God and His word are the number one priority - when people hunger after God’s Word, Satan will lose. When people do not read and study their Bible’s and don’t have daily devotion and prayer, they start to wander - Satan finds footholds in their lives. Their faith is in danger.

In Martin Luther’s day Satan worked through the Roman church. They withheld God’s Word from the people and did not teach its truth. The peasants were victims of Rome’s hypocrisy and greed.

What is our excuse today? Today, you can buy a Bible for not much money. In fact, there are many groups of people who give away Bibles free. Why do those Bibles end up gathering dust on our coffee tables? **We still need reformation.**

Of course, the ultimate reformation came in the person of Jesus Christ. He never wandered from Holy Scripture. Instead, He kept it all - the laws of Moses and the promises of the prophets - He kept it all perfectly. His ministry was dedicated to bringing the Church back to God - to restoring the relationship between God and man. Ultimately, He sacrificed Himself on the cross in order to restore that relationship that Adam and Eve had with God before the fall.

Jesus Christ triumphed over sin, death, and the devil. He rose from the dead. Jesus' resurrection offers the promise of eternal life in heaven. Those who leave this life with faith in Him as Saviour and Lord will live with Him forever. They will finally arrive in heaven where they will no longer need the reformation because they will no longer wander from God. Until then - while we wait for that day - we will want to wander away from God and His Word, thus, we will always need reformation.

God has promised that He will never leave us or forsake us. He continues to work through His Word to return us to Him. The Apostle Paul wrote, "*Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the Word of Christ,*" (Romans 10:17). The Apostle Peter wrote, "*You have been born again through the living and abiding Word of God,*" (1 Peter 1:23). The Holy Spirit works through Scripture alone. He works through His spoken and written Word and through the Word that we eat and drink as Jesus Christ gives Himself to us in His body and blood

The reformation must and will continue. It will continue because in the end, the reformation does not rely on us. It gets its power from God and He has given us His promise in His Word. He will continue to reform His Church until the world ends and His entire Church gathers around His throne in triumph and will never wander again. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.