

Reformation Sunday
Wicker Park Lutheran Church
Rev. Jason Glombicki
October 25, 2015

Halloween is Saturday, and this weekend Wicker Park and much of Chicago are full of festivals with pumpkins, corn mazes, and games. Just yesterday our church participated in Wicker Park's version called Boo-palooza. With these Halloween celebrations comes the annual process of choosing, making, and wearing a costume.

These costumes we create and design often communicate to others the essential aspects of what we are trying to represent or become. The action of creating a costume often requires us to determine what is fundamental. We have to determine if a bandana, boots, a plaid shirt, and jeans are enough to represent a cowboy. We need to figure out if dressing in white and placing a giant "S" on our stomach will get people to think "saltshaker." All in all, the choices we make about our costume determine how we view the item or individual that we attempt to embody.

It so happens that Reformation Day and Halloween are the same day. While Martin Luther wasn't dressed up as a cowboy or saltshaker when he posted his 95 theses, Luther's life long dwelling in the scriptures helps us better understand the essence of God.

The so called Reformation that was sparked by Martin Luther wasn't about making a new church, rather it was about coming to a deeper understand of the fundamentals of God. You see, in Luther's time the church had become corrupt. They were selling relics, profiting from the fear of others, using political power to wage wars, popes were having illegitimate children whom they'd name bishops, and the essence of scripture was lost.¹ Luther and the many other theologians of the reformation were trying to answer a crucial question: "how do we understand God?" To answer this question Luther emphasized the importance of scripture in the vernacular so more people could understand it. Luther translated the scriptures and he became more aware of who God was and how God worked in the world. Luther emphasized that faith is a gift from God given freely to humankind. Luther pointed to the scriptures and his experience to make these claims. He renewed Christianity's understanding of God and set the church forward on a quest to explore the depth of God.

So too in today's readings we come to understand God more deeply. In Jeremiah we're reminded that our God is a God of covenants. Our God makes promises with us and keeps those promises. Through these promises we come to know our God innately. With these guarantees given to us we're reminded that we are forgiven and our sins are remembered no more. Our God is a God who makes promises and fulfills them. In Romans we heard how we are justified by grace as a pure gift through faith. We're reminded that there's nothing we can do or will do to earn God's love, instead we are given a gift. And in John we're reminded that this gift of grace and love sets us free. This freedom is not that

¹ <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/geneveith/2012/10/reforming-the-church/>

cultural sense of freedom where we can do whatever we feel like, but rather the freedom comes from being given an identity that emanates love and service towards God and all creation. It's a freedom and identity we receive in baptism. A freedom where the fears and uncertainties of life don't rule us any longer but rather we are set free to use our brainpower to love God and our fellow humans.

This sense of freedom can be a bit difficult to understand, yet it's a crucial part of the reformation costume. A prime example of this freedom comes from the Facebook founder, Mark Zuckerberg. Someone asked Zuckerberg why he wears the same gray T-shirt and jeans almost every day. Zuckerberg said, "I really want to clear my life to make it so that I have to make as few decisions as possible about anything except how to best service this community."² By wearing the same type of shirt Zuckerberg frees himself to serve – to use his energy for others. That's the beauty of the freedom we've been given in Christ. We are freed from the worry, the stress, and the selfishness that bogs down our life. You are forever loved. You are given the gift of this community. You are cherished with your blemishes and your successes. You are God's child. In that freedom, you're liberated to do the work of loving, caring, and sharing – as a gift and not an obligation.

Given that we're freed to love our neighbor we are then reminded that our God continues to work through us and in the world around us. After all the reformation happened around 1500 years after Jesus walked the earth. So it's clear that there are moments in the salvation history where God stirs up in us the need for reformation. We do not reform the world only for the sake of reform, but rather we find better ways to love our neighbor and serve God more fully.

In our country most recently we've been challenged to envision reform to our prison system - reform that is just. Also, recent debates on the proper way to engage the income divide in the country bring to mind the need to care for all of God's children. Conversations about how to best control violence across the globe both on our streets and in times of war are all thoughtful questions we must engage as people of faith. In our God given state of freedom we have the opportunity to address injustice and respond in love.

On this reformation and homecoming Sunday, we're confronted with assurance and a challenge. With Reformation Day we've been reminded of, what was in Luther's time, a forgotten way of understanding God. The reformation reminds us that God comes to us, that God's salvation is a free gift, and that we're free to serve and love. At the same time, we're also given the challenge of coming to see God's full depth. We're reminded that we pull on God's gifts of scripture, reason, experience, and tradition to come to a more comprehensive understanding of God. It is here in this faith community that we gather to explore those questions together. It is here that we sit in the mystery of our God. It is here that we come to see God revealed in a whole new way.

My friends, each day we individually and communally work on that costume of our God. We pray, study the scriptures, and discern what communicates God's essence to others. Then we go out and live our lives freed from fear, freed to serve, and freed to love. Amen.

² <http://www.businessinsider.com/mark-zuckerberg-same-t-shirt-2014-11>