**MODIFIED SERVICE- Reformation Sunday- October 25, 2020**

**ZION EV. LUTHERAN CHURCH, PHLIPSBURG**

Welcome to everyone on this Reformation Sunday, where we continue to gather safely from the comfort of our homes as a reminder of our love for one another.

We have had lots of weather these past few days, Friday was lovely and warm, Saturday we were reminded that fall is here with cooler temperatures and heavy cloud.

Council met this week to discuss Zion’s reopening. Again, after much discussion and prayerful thought Council voted to remain closed until November 29. Covid numbers continue to increase and we keep everyone in our prayers as we continue to live in these uncertain times.

Our GotoMeeting Coffee hour meets at 11:00, please join us!

Please remember that Zion relies on your continued support each week to meet our monthly expenses. Thank you to all who support and pray for our congregation.

**GATHERING**

The Holy Spirit calls us together as the people of God.

**CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS**

Blessed be the holy Trinity, ☩ one God, who creates, redeems, and sustains us and all of creation. **Amen.**

Let us confess our sin in the presence of God.

Faithful God, **have mercy on us.** **We confess that we are captive to sin** **and cannot free ourselves.** **We turn from your loving embrace** **and go our own ways.** **We pass judgment on one another** **before examining ourselves.** **We place our own needs before those of our neighbors.** **We keep your gift of salvation to ourselves.** **Make us humble, cast away our transgressions,** **and turn us again to life in you** **through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.**

God hears the cries of all who call out in need, and through his death and resurrection,

Christ has made us his own. Hear the truth that God proclaims: Your sins are forgiven in the name of ☩ Jesus Christ. Led by the Holy Spirit, live in freedom and newness

to do God’s work in the world. **Amen.**

**GREETING**

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God,

and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

**And also with you.**

**PRAYER OF THE DAY**

Let us pray.

Almighty God, gracious Lord, we thank you that your Holy Spirit renews the church in every age. Pour out your Holy Spirit on your faithful people. Keep them steadfast in your word, protect and comfort them in times of trial, defend them against all enemies of the gospel, and bestow on the church your saving peace, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

**OPENING HYMN- A Mighty Fortress Is Our God**- **ELW 504**

1 A mighty fortress is our God,  
a sword and shield victorious;  
he breaks the cruel oppressor's rod  
and wins salvation glorious.  
The old satanic foe  
has sworn to work us woe!  
With craft and dreadful might  
he arms himself to fight.  
On earth he has no equal.  
  
2 No strength of ours can match his might!  
We would be lost, rejected.  
But now a champion comes to fight,  
whom God himself elected.  
You ask who this may be?  
The Lord of hosts is he!  
Christ Jesus, mighty Lord,  
God's only Son, adored.  
He holds the field victorious.  
  
3 Though hordes of devils fill the land  
all threat'ning to devour us,  
we tremble not, unmoved we stand;  
they cannot overpow'r us.  
Let this world's tyrant rage;  
in battle we'll engage!  
His might is doomed to fail;  
God's judgment must prevail!  
One little word subdues him.  
  
4 God's Word forever shall abide,  
no thanks to foes, who fear it;  
for God himself fights by our side  
with weapons of the Spirit.  
Were they to take our house,  
goods, honor, child, or spouse,  
through life be wrenched away,  
they cannot win the day.  
The kingdom's ours forever!

**WORD**

God speaks to us in scripture reading, preaching, and song.

**FIRST READING: Jeremiah 31:31-34**

A reading from Jeremiah.

31The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. 32It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. 33But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 34No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, “Know the Lord,” for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

**PSALM: Psalm 46**

1God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.  
 2Therefore we will not fear, though the earth be moved, and though the mountains shake in the depths of the sea;  
 3though its waters rage and foam, and though the mountains tremble with its tumult.  
 4There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High.  
 5God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be shaken; God shall help it at the break of day.  
 6The nations rage, and the kingdoms shake; God speaks, and the earth melts away.   
 7The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our stronghold.  
 8Come now, regard the works of the Lord, what desolations God has brought upon the earth;  
 9behold the one who makes war to cease in all the world; who breaks the bow, and shatters the spear, and burns the shields with fire.  
 10“Be still, then, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations; I will be exalted in the earth.”  
 11The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our stronghold.

**SECOND READING: Romans 3:19-28**

A reading from Romans.

19Now we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. 20For “no human being will be justified in his sight” by deeds prescribed by the law, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin.  
 21But now, apart from law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, 22the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, 23since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; 24they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. He did this to show his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed; 26it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies the one who has faith in Jesus.  
  27Then what becomes of boasting? It is excluded. By what law? By that of works? No, but by the law of faith. 28For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law.

**GOSPEL: John 8:31-36**

The holy gospel according to John.

31Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; 32and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” 33They answered him, “We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying, ‘You will be made free’?”  
  34Jesus answered them, “Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. 35The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there forever. 36So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.”

The gospel of the Lord.

**SERMON**

On October 31, 1517, Augustinian priest and professor of Moral Theology, Martin Luther challenged the Pope and the Roman Catholic church by publishing a list of 95 theses and posting them on the door of the chapel at the University of Wittenberg in Germany. He wrote the theses in the hopes of beginning an academic debate in response to the corruption he experienced within the Catholic Church, especially the need to pay indulgences to the church to be granted forgiveness of sin. Luther struggled with this belief and dogma found within the church. His spirit was crushed, and he felt distanced from God. In his eyes, the church was turning away from Scripture and God, to power, greed, and money.

         Luther spent much time alone in his room, praying, and reading the bible, looking for hope in the Word that had carried him through his life. He finally found that hope in the words of Romans 3:23-25, “For there is no distinction since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith.” In hearing those words of grace and promise Luther was reborn, and Scripture took on a whole new meaning in his life. Tradition and hierarchy in the Catholic church were the spiritual authority, but now Luther understood that the bible and the words within it were the true sources of spiritual authority. Luther felt the freedom of the gospel and the freedom of Jesus Christ. He wrote the 95 theses not to start a new church, but to bring to light the corruption of the church in hopes of reforming and renewing it, in hopes of enlivening the faith of churchgoers and the leadership, in hopes of rebuilding a relationship with God through the witness of Jesus Christ. Within 2 weeks word had spread all throughout Germany about this priest who was challenging the spiritual authority of the church.

It should come as no surprise that folks all over the world are struggling in 2020. We are overwhelmed with the pandemic, politics, protests, injustice, oppression, hate, and greed. Businesses have been shuttered, and the doors of our churches were locked for 6 months. I wonder what Luther would have thought if he was alive in 2020, if he was witness to the events that have shaped our year. Would he sit down at his computer and write another 95 theses lamenting the sin and struggle that our world is facing? And instead of posting them on the door of a chapel, would he post them on social media instead? How quickly would news travel in our 24 nonstop news world? Would he be considered a conspiracy theorist or the purveyor of fake news? Or would his theses be considered an authentic response of freedom and truth, of reformation and renewal in a world that is seemingly tired and broken?

         The contemporary meaning of freedom is to be able to speak or act without hindrance or restraint, basically to do whatever we want, whenever we want. David Lose suggests that, according to Scripture, [this] is not freedom, but rather simply another form of bondage, this time to the vain pursuit of actualization through self-assertion and self-gratification. And that understanding of freedom results not only in bondage but death.”[[1]](#footnote-1) This meaning of freedom creates an individualistic sense where we are separated from our neighbour and looking out only for ourselves. This freedom denies a relationship with others and with God.

         The freedom Jesus speaks of in our gospel reading from verses 31 and 32, “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free,” is a different type of freedom. In the eyes of Jesus, to be free is to know and trust that God is here right now. It is to know that God is present in our lives offering us a relationship of unconditional love through the grace and mercy in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, no matter the mistakes we make. God offers us the amazing gift of grace that never needs to be repaid, leaving us the freedom to make a difference in the world, to love one another as we have been loved, and to live in community with one another.

         The church of today is in a tumultuous time, and I have heard some folks compare these times to the years of reformation, to the years of change and renewal of over 500 years ago. Over these past 7 months, the doors of Zion have been closed, but that does not mean that the work of the church has been stagnant. Zion has found new ways to love our neighbour, they have found new ways to reach out to one another in love and care, living out the work and Word of Jesus Christ. God is continuing to work in the church revealing Godself through our love for each other and our prayers, even though we are not physically together.

         Luther’s theses started a reformation that changed the world as we know it. Luther believed that God was not a deity to be feared, that God was a God of love, a God of faith justified by grace. The bible was not accessible to common folk as it was written in Hebrew and Greek, so Luther translated it into German so that all could know of God’s unconditional grace and love for all. His love of music and liturgy renewed the church, giving way more meaningful worship services and the many beloved hymns that we still sing today. Both our opening hymn and the hymn of the day were composed by Luther.

         Luther was steadfast in the belief that the bible was the true source of spiritual authority. Salvation could not be reached by any amount of works that one does. Salvation is reached by faith through the unbelievable grace of Jesus Christ. This shaped the core of Protestantism and our Lutheran beliefs, that we still hold today. True freedom is liberating, true freedom sustains us in times of struggle, so may we continue to live in the true freedom that God provides, acknowledging our relationship with a loving God that sustains us through this life and the next. **Amen.**

**HYMN OF THE DAYLord, Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word - ELW 517**

[**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=teI3ayeBxX0**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=teI3ayeBxX0)

**PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION**

With confidence in God’s grace and mercy, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need. *A brief silence.*

Renew and inspire the church in the freedom of the gospel, O God. Where the church is in error, reform it. Where the church speaks your truth, strengthen it. Where the church is divided, unify it. Ignite in us the working of the Holy Spirit.  Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

As the earth changes, as mountains shake and the waters roar, may we care for this planet as a holy habitation for all living things. Sustain all peoples and lands recovering from natural disasters of any kind including wildfires, hurricanes, and flooding. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Guide areas of the world divided or traumatized by conflict, especially in our own land. Free all from slavery and human trafficking and protect all in harm’s way. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Release those living in bondage to debts, chronic health issues and pain, or addiction. Grant your healing touch to those who are ill, we especially remember Eddie, Elaine, Susie, Ruth, Donelda, Lynette, Barb, Sarah, Carol, and those we name in the stillness of our hearts. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

In this family of faith, we give thanks for courageous voices that have remained firm in their commitment to the one who frees us from sin and death. Centered in your grace, unify us in the hope of the gospel. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Even in death, you free us and give us a place in your house. We give thanks for our ancestors who have shown us truth and freedom, especially Martin Luther and those who work for the renewal of the church. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Listen as we call on you, O God, and enfold in your loving arms all for whom we pray, in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

**PEACE**

The peace of Christ be with you always.

**And also with you.**

**reformation PRayer**

Let us pray,

Steadfast God, give us courage to look for reformation  when we’ve become too set in our ways. Do not let us be too afraid of change. Loving God, give us courage and faith to give room for your Spirit in our lives,  in the lives of our families and, ultimately, in the life of our Church. And as you do that, fill us with your love and joy, so that we could be the salt of the Earth and the light of the World.

In the name of your Son, our loving Saviour, **Amen.**

**LORD’S PRAYER**

Gathered into one by the Holy Spirit, let us pray as Jesus taught us.

**Our Father, who art in heaven,**

**hallowed be thy name,**

**thy kingdom come,**

**thy will be done,**

**on earth as it is in heaven.**

**Give us this day our daily bread;**

**and forgive us our trespasses,**

**as we forgive those**

**who trespass against us;**

**and lead us not into temptation,**

**but deliver us from evil.**

**For thine is the kingdom,**

**and the power, and the glory,**

**forever and ever. Amen.**

**SENDING**

God blesses us and sends us in mission to the world.

**BLESSING**

For all that God can do within us, for all that God can do without us,

**Thanks be to God!**

For all in whom Christ lived before us, for all in whom Christ lives beside us,

**Thanks be to God!**

For all the Spirit wants to bring us, for where the Spirit wants to send us,

**Thanks be to God!**

The blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with you and on your way together, now and forever.

**Amen.**

**DISMISSAL**

Go in peace. Christ is with you.

**Thanks be to God.**

**SENDING HYMN How Firm a Foundation** **ELW 796**

1 How firm a foundation, O saints of the Lord, is laid for your faith in Christ Jesus, the Word!  
What more can he say than to you he has said who unto the Savior for refuge have fled?  
  
2 "Fear not, I am with you, oh, be not dismayed, for I am your God and will still give you aid;  
I'll strengthen you, help you, and cause you to stand, upheld by my righteous, omnipotent hand."

3 "When through fiery trials your pathway shall lie, my grace, all-sufficient, shall be your supply.  
The flames shall not hurt you; I only design your dross to consume and your gold to refine."  
  
4 "Throughout all their lifetime my people shall prove my sov'reign, eternal, unchangeable love;  
and then, when gray hairs shall their temples adorn,  
like lambs they shall still in my bosom be borne."

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1. David Lose, “Reformation/Pen21 A: Freedom!,” In the Meantime RSS, accessed October 23, 2020, <http://www.davidlose.net/2020/10/reformation-pen21-a-freedom/> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)