

I Timothy 6:17-19

October 29, '17

Reformation Sunday

“A FOUNDATION FOR THE FUTURE”

TODAY IS A DAY THAT ALWAYS PRESENTS A DILEMMA IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH.

IN THE NOT TOO DISTANT PAST, WE’VE HAD CONVERSATION ABOUT THAT DILEMMA WITH OUR WORSHIP & MUSIC COMMITTEE.

IT’S SIMILAR TO THE DILEMMA WE EXPERIENCE IN THE YEARS WHEN PENTECOST FALLS ON THE SECOND SUNDAY OF MAY – MOTHER’S DAY.

WHERE DO WE PLACE OUR FOCUS IN WORSHIP?

THE DILEMMA WITH THE FINAL SUNDAY OF OCTOBER IS THAT WE ARE ALWAYS – AS ARE MOST CHURCHES – IN THE MIDST OF OUR ANNUAL STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM, WHILE THE LAST SUNDAY OF OCTOBER IS ALSO THE DAY WE REFER TO AS REFORMATION SUNDAY.

THIS YEAR THE DILEMMA IS SOMEWHAT LESS PERPLEXING BECAUSE THIS IS A YEAR UNLIKE ANY OTHER FOR ANYONE HERE TODAY OR EVEN FOR VIRTUALLY ANY OF OUR KNOWN ANCESTORS WHEN IT COMES TO OUR OBSERVANCE & COMMEMORATION OF REFORMATION DAY.

THIS IS THE 500TH ANNIVERSARY OF WHAT WE HAVE LABELLED THE BEGINNING OF THE REFORMATION.

IT WAS ON OCTOBER 31ST, 1517, THAT 34-YEAR-OLD MARTIN LUTHER, AN AUGUSTINIAN MONK, NAILED 95 THESES – STATEMENTS OF BELIEF – TO THE DOOR OF CHRIST CHURCH IN WITTENBERG, GERMANY.

BEFORE GOING ANY FURTHER WITH THIS, I'M REMINDED OF SOMETHING THAT WAS WRITTEN JUST A FEW YEARS AGO BY DAVID LOSE, A SEMINARY PRESIDENT, AS HE WAS OFFERING SUGGESTIONS ABOUT PREACHING ON REFORMATION SUNDAY.

HE SAID, "*THIS REFORMATION SUNDAY, I DON'T WANT TO HEAR A SERMON ABOUT MARTIN LUTHER. I DON'T WANT TO HEAR ABOUT HOW GREAT THE REFORMATION WAS. AND I DEFINITELY DON'T WANT A HISTORY LESSON!*"

SO, IF YOUR FEELINGS ARE LIKE HIS, YOU CAN BREATHE A SIGH OF RELIEF.

YOU'VE DODGED THAT BULLET BECAUSE I'M GOING TO ABIDE BY THAT ADVICE REGARDING A REFORMATION SUNDAY SERMON – FOR THE MOST PART.

BUT, AS I SAID, THAT WAS WRITTEN SEVERAL YEARS AGO BY DAVID LOSE – NOT ON THE 500TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE REFORMATION!

BUT THAT STATEMENT LED ME TO THINK MORE ABOUT – NOT THE *HISTORY* OF THE REFORMATION – BUT ITS PURPOSE.

AND WHEN I THOUGHT ABOUT WHAT THE PURPOSE OF THE REFORMATION MEANS FOR ME, I STARTED THINKING ABOUT IMPORTANT THINGS THAT PEOPLE SAY TO US AT VARIOUS TIMES OF LIFE THAT STAY WITH US.

AFTER ALL, WHAT DAVID LOSE SAID IS SOMETHING THAT I READ SEVERAL YEARS AGO – AND I'VE REMEMBERED IT – IT STAYED WITH ME.

I HAD OCCASION THIS PAST WEEK TO MENTION TO SOMEONE SOMETHING ELSE THAT HAS STAYED WITH ME - A BIT OF WISDOM MY

FATHER-IN-LAW FREQUENTLY SHARED WITH EMMA SUE & ME AT TIMES WHEN WE WERE FRUSTRATED IN RAISING OUR CHILDREN.

HE WOULD RELIEVE OUR ANXIETY BY SAYING, “EVERYONE HAS TO CLIMB FOOL’S HILL WHEN THEY’RE YOUNG. THEY ALL MAKE IT TO THE TOP & GET TO THE OTHER SIDE. IT JUST TAKES SOME A BIT LONGER THAN OTHERS.”

THAT IMPORTANT PIECE OF WISDOM HAS STAYED WITH ME & I SHARE IT FREQUENTLY.

THIS WEEK, I ALSO REMEMBERED SOMETHING MY MENTOR MAC ONCE SAID IN A SERMON.

I WAS JUST OUT OF SEMINARY AND, OF COURSE, I KNEW EVERYTHING.

TO ME, MAC HAD AN INGENIOUS WAY OF MAKING THE MOST TRIVIAL, INNANE & CHEESY STATEMENTS SOUND PROFOUND.

WHAT I REMEMBERED THIS WEEK WAS HIM TELLING THE LEGEND OF A KING WHO ASKED HIS MOST TRUSTED ADVISOR TO GIVE HIM ONE STATEMENT THAT WOULD TAKE HIM THROUGH ALL THE HIGHS & LOWS OF LIFE – ONE THING THAT HE COULD REMEMBER THAT WOULD PREVENT HIM FROM FEELING TOO HIGH & MIGHTY IN THE GOOD TIMES & TOO DEPRESSED & DISCOURAGED IN THE BAD TIMES.

I REMEMBER – SITTING ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE CHANCEL AS HE TOLD THIS – THINKING, “OH, HE’S NOT REALLY GOING TO GIVE US THAT OLD WORN-OUT RULE FOR LIFE, IS HE?”

BUT, SURE ENOUGH, THAT’S WHAT MAC DID.

HE LOOKED OVER THE TOP OF HIS GLASSES - WHICH HE ALWAYS DID WHEN HE WANTED TO ALERT PEOPLE THAT HE WAS ABOUT TO SAY SOMETHING VERY PROFOUND – AND THEN HE PAUSED

FOR EFFECT & SAID, “*THAT WISE ADVISOR OFFERED THE KING FOUR LITTLE ONE-SYLLABLE WORDS*” (AND, OF COURSE, MAC HELD UP FOUR FINGERS) – “*THIS, TOO, SHALL PASS.*”

BUT HERE’S THE THING – I WAS SITTING THERE ACROSS FROM MAC - YOUNG, NEWLY-ORDAINED & AS BIBLICALLY & THEOLOGICALLY WISE AS I WOULD EVER BE IN MY LIFE, THINKING WHAT HE WAS SAYING WAS TRIVIAL, INNANE & CHEESY.

AND YET, NEARLY 40 YEARS LATER, EVERY TIME I THINK OF THAT ADVICE & THAT GUIDANCE FOR MAKING IT THROUGH EVERY CIRCUMSTANCE OF LIFE, I HEAR IT IN MAC’S VOICE.

THERE ARE STATEMENTS THAT WE HEAR AT VARIOUS TIMES OF LIFE THAT WE REMEMBER – STATEMENTS THAT WE HEARKEN BACK TO TIME AND TIME AGAIN – PEARLS OF WISDOM THAT STAY WITH US & STRENGTHEN US, COMFORT US, SUSTAIN US, ENCOURAGE US & CHALLENGE US.

LET ME GO BACK TO SOMETHING I SAID EARLIER.

I SAID, “*WHEN I THOUGHT ABOUT WHAT THE PURPOSE OF THE REFORMATION MEANS FOR ME, I STARTED THINKING ABOUT IMPORTANT THINGS THAT PEOPLE SAY TO US AT VARIOUS TIMES OF LIFE THAT STAY WITH US.*”

TO ME, THE PURPOSE OF THE REFORMATION – MORE THAN ANYTHING ELSE – INVOLVES SOMETHING IMPORTANT THAT IS SAID TO ME IN WORSHIP EVERY SINGLE SUNDAY.

MOST OF YOU KNOW THAT, FOR THE PAST SEVERAL MONTHS, WE’VE HAD A GROUP – “THE WORSHIP EXPLORATION TEAM” – THAT HAS BEEN LOOKING CLOSELY AT OUR WORSHIP SERVICE.

THEY’VE SOLICITED YOUR IDEAS & HAVE TAKEN YOUR SUGGESTIONS SERIOUSLY.

I THINK I CAN BE FAIRLY FLEXIBLE IN MY APPROACH TO OUR WORSHIP STYLE & THE VARIOUS ELEMENTS WE INCLUDE WITHIN OUR SERVICE EACH WEEK.

ONE OF THE THINGS, THOUGH, THAT FOR ME IS AN ESSENTIAL PART OF OUR WORSHIP SERVICE IS OUR TIME OF CONFESSION & ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS.

IT'S THAT LAST PART THAT I WOULD SAY IS, TO ME, THE PRIMARY PURPOSE OF THE REFORMATION.

IT'S THAT LAST PART THAT IS THE THING THAT IS SAID TO ME EVERY SUNDAY IN WORSHIP THAT IS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS I'VE EVER HEARD IN MY LIFE.

IT'S A STATEMENT THAT I REMEMBER – A STATEMENT THAT STAYS WITH ME & STRENGTHENS, COMFORTS, SUSTAINS, ENCOURAGES & CHALLENGES ME.

IT'S THOSE FINAL WORDS YOU HEARD THIS MORNING FROM TONY (PATTI) – *“FRIENDS, BELIEVE & ACCEPT THE GOOD NEWS. IN JESUS CHRIST, WE ARE FORGIVEN. THANKS BE TO GOD!”*

WHATEVER ELSE THE REFORMATION WAS ABOUT, IT WAS PRIMARILY ABOUT THAT – THE ASSURANCE THAT, EVEN THOUGH WE ARE – EVERY ONE OF US – A SINNER, WE HAVE THE ASSURANCE THAT IN JESUS CHRIST WE ARE FORGIVEN & WE ARE ACCEPTED BY A LOVING GOD WHO WILL NEVER LEAVE US OR FORSAKE US.

IN FACT, THAT'S EXACTLY THE ISSUE THAT WAS ADDRESSED IN THE VERY FIRST OF MARTIN LUTHER'S 95 THESES.

IT READS, *“OUR LORD AND MASTER JESUS CHRIST, WHEN HE SAID, ‘REPENT,’ WILLED THAT THE WHOLE LIFE OF BELIEVERS SHOULD BE REPENTANCE.”*

“REPENT” – THE WORD THAT JESUS USED – HAD BEEN CHANGED BY THE CHURCH TO “*DO PENANCE*” – THE ACT OF GIVING MONEY TO BUY FORGIVENESS.

THAT’S WHY THAT STATEMENT THAT WE HEAR WEEK IN & WEEK OUT – “*FRIENDS, BELIEVE & ACCEPT THE GOOD NEWS – IN JESUS CHRIST, WE ARE FORGIVEN*” – IS SO VITALLY IMPORTANT & WHY IT STANDS AT THE HEART OF THE REFORMATION’S PURPOSE.

CAN YOU POSSIBLY IMAGINE WHAT IT WOULD BE LIKE TO BE TOLD THAT YOU MUST GIVE FINANCIALLY TO THE CHURCH TO BE FORGIVEN BY GOD FOR YOUR SINS?

THAT KIND OF THINKING – THAT KIND OF BELIEVING – RUNS IN THE EXACT OPPOSITE DIRECTION TO WHAT WE FIND IN SCRIPTURE.

YOU GIVE – NOT TO BE FORGIVEN – BUT RATHER BECAUSE YOU’VE BEEN FORGIVEN.

YOU GIVE BECAUSE GOD – IN JESUS CHRIST – HAS ALREADY FORGIVEN YOU & ACCEPTED YOU & PROMISED YOU ABUNDANT & ETERNAL LIFE.

AND THAT’S WHAT WE FIND IN THIS PASSAGE WE’VE READ THIS MORNING FROM I TIMOTHY.

EARLIER IN THIS CHAPTER, PAUL HAS GIVEN US A FEW OF THOSE STATEMENTS THAT STAY WITH US –STATEMENTS THAT OFFER US GUIDANCE FOR LIVING.

IT’S IN THIS CHAPTER THAT PAUL SAYS, “...*WE BROUGHT NOTHING INTO THIS WORLD, SO THAT WE CAN TAKE NOTHING OUT OF IT.*”

IT’S HERE – JUST A FEW VERSES PRIOR TO THE ONES WE READ – THAT HE SAYS, “*FOR THE LOVE OF MONEY IS A ROOT OF ALL KINDS OF EVIL.*”

IN OUR VERSES FOR TODAY, PAUL HAS SOME FUN WITH THE WORD “RICHES” – HE USES IT FIVE TIMES, CONTRASTING THE RICHES OF THIS WORLD WITH THE RICHES OF LIVING ACCORDING TO GOD’S WILL.

AND HE ALSO GIVES US ONE OF THOSE STATEMENTS THAT CAN CHANGE US – A STATEMENT THAT CAN STAY WITH US – A STATEMENT THAT WE CAN REMEMBER FOREVER – A STATEMENT THAT CAN STRENGTHEN, COMFORT, SUSTAIN, CHALLENGE & ENCOURAGE US.

HE SAYS – IN SPEAKING PERSONALLY TO YOU – *“YOU ARE TO DO GOOD, TO BE RICH IN GOOD WORKS, GENEROUS, AND READY TO SHARE, THUS STORING UP FOR YOURSELF THE TREASURE OF A GOOD FOUNDATION FOR THE FUTURE, SO THAT YOU MAY TAKE HOLD OF THE LIFE THAT REALLY IS LIFE.”*

LAST WEEK, OUR SON DREW CALLED ME LATE ONE NIGHT.

HE WAS OUT RUNNING & HE WAS BORED.

THAT MAKES A PARENT FEEL SPECIAL.

THOSE OF YOU WITH ADULT CHILDREN KNOW WHAT I’M TALKING ABOUT.

THE KIDS CALL WHEN THEY’RE DRIVING HOME FROM WORK & WANT TO PASS THE TIME.

DREW HAS NEVER BEEN A RUNNER – UNTIL THIS PAST JUNE.

A REPRESENTATIVE OF WORLD VISION CAME TO HIS CHURCH IN FISHERS & TALKED ABOUT “TEAM WORLD VISION” – A GROUP RUNNING THE INDIANAPOLIS MARATHON & HALF-MARATHON TO RAISE MONEY TO BUILD WELLS AROUND THE WORLD – SIMILAR TO OUR ANNUAL INVOLVEMENT IN THE H2O PROJECT THAT DOES THE SAME THING.

DREW, REMEMBERING WHAT WE DO HERE, BECAME INSPIRED TO JOIN THE TEAM & SEE IF HE MIGHT BE ABLE TO START RUNNING FOR THE FIRST TIME TO BE IN GOOD ENOUGH SHAPE TO RUN THE HALF-MARATHON NEXT SATURDAY.

THE MORE HE RAN, THE MORE HE THOUGHT ABOUT THE MERE \$50 IT TAKES TO SUPPLY WATER FOR LIFE FOR ONE PERSON.

THE 2 DOLLARS A MILE HE WAS ASKING FROM FRIENDS & CO-WORKERS COULD BE DOUBLED IF HE DID THE WHOLE THING SO, WITHIN A MONTH, HE DECIDED TO DO THE ENTIRE 26 MILES, 385 YARDS.

THE REASON I TELL YOU THIS, THOUGH, IS BECAUSE OF SOMETHING HE SAID TO ME WHILE RUNNING LAST WEEK.

DREW IS A SELF-CONFESSED APPLE GEEK.

HE HAS EVERY NEW IPHONE WITHIN A WEEK OF ITS RELEASE.

HE JUST GOT THE BRAND-NEW, THIRD GENERATION APPLE WATCH WHICH MEANS HE GAVE A NEIGHBOR HIS FIRST ONE & HAS THE SECOND ONE SITTING IN A DRAWER.

I ASKED HIM HOW HE LIKED IT & HE SAID, *“I THINK I’M GOING TO RETURN IT.”*

I SAID, *“NOT ENOUGH CHANGES TO MAKE IT WORTH IT?”*

HE PAUSED – PERHAPS BECAUSE HE WAS THINKING OR PERHAPS BECAUSE HE WAS RUNNING – AND HE SAID, *“NO, IT’S WORTH IT, BUT I KEEP THINKING, ‘I CAN HAVE THIS NEW WATCH OR I CAN GIVE 6 PEOPLE WATER FOR LIFE.’ I’LL REMEMBER THOSE 6 PEOPLE EVERY TIME I LOOK AT THE WATCH ON MY WRIST. I’D RATHER THINK OF WHAT I GAVE THEM THAN WHAT I KEPT FOR MYSELF. YEAH, I’M SENDING IT BACK & KEEPING THE OLD ONE.”*

WHETHER CONCIIOUSLY OR UNCONCIIOUSLY, WITH THAT STATEMENT DREW WAS REMEMBERING THOSE WORDS WE'VE READ THIS MORNING FROM PAUL'S LETTER TO TIMOTHY BECAUSE THEY'RE WORDS THAT WE FIND ALL THROUGH SCRIPTURE IN ONE FORM OR ANOTHER.

“YOU ARE TO DO GOOD, TO BE RICH IN GOOD WORKS, GENEROUS, AND READY TO SHARE, THUS STORING UP FOR YOURSELF THE TREASURE OF A GOOD FOUNDATION FOR THE FUTURE, SO THAT YOU MAY TAKE HOLD OF THE LIFE THAT REALLY IS LIFE.”

WE DON'T GIVE TO BE FORGIVEN.

WE GIVE BECAUSE WE'VE ALREADY BEEN FORGIVEN.

WHEN WE GIVE, WE'RE STORING UP THE TREASURE OF A GOOD FOUNDATION FOR THE FUTURE.

WHEN WE GIVE, IT IS THEN – AND ONLY THEN – THAT WE TAKE HOLD OF THE LIFE THAT REALLY IS LIFE.

SO, WHAT DO YOU KNOW – THERE REALLY IS NO DILEMMA ON THIS LAST SUNDAY OF OCTOBER – REFORMATION & STEWARDSHIP FIT PERFECTLY TOGETHER. AMEN.

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