



ONE VOICE



Churches: ♦Bethany ♦Immanuel ♦Lunder ♦Silver Lake ♦Winnebago

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From the Pastor's Desk

"For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law." Romans 6:28



When I think about October several people and events pop into my mind. Bonnie Kay's birthday is in October. The leaves on the trees are usually brilliant reds and yellows. Later, the wind blows and the beautiful leaves roll across lawns until they are raked up and gathered. Early October the combines are in the field with catch carts and semis bringing the soybeans to town. Later in October the combines and the catch carts and semis are in the corn fields. All the time prayers are being said to keep farmers safe, hold off the rain until after the harvest and let there be an abundant harvest. There is a coolness in the air having us wearing fall jackets and friends are cheering on the high school football and volleyball teams. College football fans are cheering on the Iowa Hawkeyes, {maybe not this year} and the Iowa State Cyclones. Besides all these events and people, I think about Reformation Sunday. I am a Lutheran Pastor after all. When I change the calendar from September to October, Reformation Sunday comes to mind first.



I think about Martin Luther with pages in hand, containing 95 theses, statements for debate, walking towards the door of the Wittenberg church. Many events had brought Martin Luther to that

day, as he walked across town from the monastery to the Wittenberg church. As you may recall, Martin Luther grew up in a new Middle Class family, his dad became an owner of several mines. This afforded Martin Luther the opportunity to attend Erfurt University studying to become a lawyer. At the end of one weekend, when Martin had come home to visit his parents for the weekend, as Martin was riding his horse back to Erfurt, a thunderstorm suddenly blew in with lightning, wind and rain flashing all about him. Luther prayed to St. Ann, the saint for travelers, to save him from the storm and he would become a monk. When Martin arrived at Erfurt, he joined the monastery of Augustine Monks in Erfurt. Luther wrestled with his faith, with the teachings of the Church at the time. The primary image of Jesus, was that of a Judge, who knew every sin, thought, word and deed. The church was the agent for forgiveness. The sacrament of confession and absolution were forefront with acts of penance assigned by the priest to the confessor. Pilgrimages to Rome, where prayers could be said, allowed so many years of forgiveness. Luther wrestled with how could he love God, who is so Holy and Just and he such a sinner. How could he ever earn enough righteousness before a Holy and just God, who knew every thought word and deed. Luther's mentor Fr. Johann Staupitz knew Luther had a brilliant mind and a love for God so he assigned Luther to become a Professor of Theology at the new Wittenberg University. There Luther studied the scriptures. Luther rediscovered the gospel, the good news of God's

grace, in Paul's letter to the Romans, "For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribe by the law." Luther wrote in his Bible the word "alone", by faith alone. This was also about the time the Pope had issued Indulgences for sale. Indulgences were pieces of paper with the Pope insignia declaring the owner of this piece of paper was forgiven of their sins and they or a loved one would go directly to heaven. This flew directly against the promise of scripture rediscovered by Luther, which declared forgiveness as a gift of grace and could not be bought by a piece of paper. So Luther was ready to discuss what he perceived to be errors of teaching by the Pope and the church. Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the church door, the community bulletin board back then. Someone translated the 95 Theses from Latin to German and with the printing press, they were spread throughout Germany and the Reformation was begun.

Except for Pastors and Confirmands and their families, I don't think the Reformation is on anybody else's mind. In Luther's time the Church was prominent part of society. Sin and salvation were on everybody's mind from the Emperor, to the Princes, the new Middle class to the peasants. Now a days, the idea of sin and the need for forgiveness has fallen off the scene of our modern day culture. If we talk about "sin", others are quick to tune out calling us judgmental and a hypocrite, asking who are you to judge me? Without the urgency of our sin known by our Creator, there is no celebratory feelings about the Reformation that lifted up the Grace of God.

Even though "sin" may not be on our culture's radar, it is still prevalent in our society and in our lives. Apostle Paul also wrote, "We are all sinners, all of us falling short of the glory of God." Then Paul looks to the cross of Christ, the Son of the Living God, and declares we cannot earn enough righteousness to become justified in our relationship with God. If that were true, Paul argues, then Jesus wouldn't have had to endure the cross and death. Which leads Paul to declare, "For we hold that a person is justified by faith, apart from works of the law." In other words, we are not the actors in our justification. God is the actor, through Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection and the power of the Holy Spirit to call us to faith. This is the good news we celebrate at Reformation Sunday. This is the good news we are called to share with neighbors. In this broken world in which we live, we have a God, who loves us, redeems us, and claims us. This is a free gift of grace from God. Let's celebrate our heritage and share the good news to a world which desperately needs to hear it.

Pastor Randy

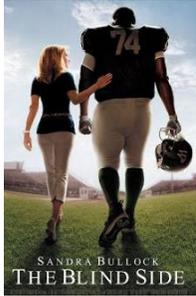


WANDERINGS AND WONDERINGS



Some of you may remember the movie "The Blind Side" (2009). A little back to understand the movie, it is a true story that took many liberties in the movie story line. It is about Michael Oher, a 17 year old high school student, a big boy who becomes very good at football.

Michael spent much of his life in foster care with different families due to his mother's drug addiction. Every time he is placed in a new home, he runs away. A friend gets him enrolled in a prestigious private school, even though his academic record is poor. A fellow student, Sean Jr., befriends him and after a series of encounters SJ's family invites Michael to live with them. He becomes part of the family and they ended up adopting him.



Michael is heavily recruited by many prestigious schools. SJ talks to coaches and negotiates on Michael's behalf. When Michael gets his grades high enough, he decides to attend the University of Mississippi, where Sean, Sr. had played basketball and Leigh Anne had been a cheerleader. That causes NCAA investigator to look into the matter to determine if this family took him in and unduly influenced him just so he would play for their alma mater.

Michael runs away before the interview is over and confronts his adoptive mother about her motives for taking him in. He finds his biological mother, she is not in a good place in her life. Nothing he can do. Wonders about his old "hood" and after thinking things over and questioning his adoptive mother, Michael tells the NCAA investigator he chose Ole Miss because "This is what my family does. It's where my family goes to school".

The last few weeks on Sunday, we have been talking about forgiveness. We might say forgiveness is our nemesis. There is nothing easy about forgiveness – it haunts in a number of ways. We have a love/hate relationship with forgiveness. We love and need to be forgiven. But we have a hard time forgiving others. Sometimes, I dare say "always", we find it impossible.

But we pray "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive others" and we hear the story about the unforgiving servant – and God's forgiveness begins to sound like it is conditional. And we don't have to think hard to realize "if forgiveness is conditional" that is not good for us. If we have to forgive to be forgiven – we lose!

As William Willimon suggests "'The human animal is not (supposed to be) good at forgiveness. Forgiveness is not some innate, natural human emotion ... forgiveness is not natural. It is not a universal human virtue.'" I will be so bold to say, forgiveness is humanly impossible.

But what forgiveness is essential to abundant living, translated – forgiveness is essential to live in the Kingdom of God. That's one reason Jesus emphasized to his followers that they must learn to forgive. Forgiveness and the "kingdom of God" go hand-in-hand. Like in the movie, "This is what (our) family does." We forgive.

How do we do this?

- First of all, **realize that you can't**. It is not natural or possible for humans to forgive. But for God all things are possible. God can. You can only forgive when God is working through you.
- Second, **realize that forgiveness is not reactive, but proactive**. You, the wounded, like God, must take the initiative.
- Thirdly, **realize that forgiveness is not an emotion or feeling – it is a choice**. We choose to take the initiative and bring Christ into the situation.
- Finally, **realize forgiveness is a gift from God – to be forgiven and to forgive**. Forgiveness is the most powerful witness we have to the activity of grace in our own lives.

We have been forgiven, and thus, by God's presence and God's power, we are able to forgive others. This is what the kingdom of God is! Either we are in, or we are out. This isn't being recommended ... this is not guidelines ... this is the baseline of the kingdom – it is about being forgiven ... and forgiving. It is "all in" reality.

Forgiveness is not conditional. It is a gift from God – both to be forgiven and to forgive others. This fact does not make either receiving forgiveness or sharing forgiveness any easier. It is hard ... impossible

.Forgiving others is not a litmus test to see if we pass. It is just what we do. That is why the promise that God is with us, helping us, working through us to forgive, is so important. We can't do it, so don't fool yourself. But God can do it through us, and for us .

Forgiveness
Is the
Foundation

Forgiving is life lived in the image of Christ. This is the principle reason we forgive: this is what Christ would do ... this is what Christ would have us do. *Martin*

Niemoller, a Lutheran pastor, was a Nazi prisoner of war. He learned the meaning of forgiveness from his prison experience. Through his cell window, he watched others being executed and wonder what his response was going to be when it was his turn.

Niemoller says, "It took me a long time to learn that God is not the enemy of my enemies. He is not even the enemy of his enemies. For Jesus cried out, 'Father forgive them.'" You and I want to live as Jesus lived. Forgiveness was what Jesus was all about. Even those who hated him had their sins nailed to Golgotha's tree ever to be forgotten. Even those who cursed him, spat upon him, beat him, drove nails into his hands and feet (could) have their sins removed by his grace. When we forgive others, we are but repeating what was done in our behalf 2,000 years ago at a place called Calvary. This is our witness to the world "that we have been redeemed". We forgive as we have been forgiven. And when that happens, God blesses our lives and we become a blessing to others and to ourselves.

Forgiveness – it is what our family (of God) does.

Wanderings and Wonderings, Pastor Bill Peters

