

**“Reformed and Always Reforming,” (500 Anniversary of the Reformation), Pentecost 20, Oct. 22, 2017, FPC Marshfield**

Texts: Jeremiah 31:31-34, Ps. 46, Rom. 3:19-28, John 8:31-36

On October 31, 1517, Martin Luther (1483-1546), an Augustinian monk, posted 95 theses on the door of his church in Wittenberg, outlining the problems he saw in the medieval church. He wasn't the first to question the church's practices—Jon Hus and John Wycliffe were among earlier reformers, but this time the idea of reform caught fire and the Reformation began to spread throughout Europe. Luther didn't intend to split the church but that is what happened.

Luther struggled with his own faith, sometimes becoming very depressed about the possibility of his salvation. One day he was reading Paul's letter to the Romans, our epistle lesson for today, and he came upon the idea that salvation comes to us by faith and grace alone. It is a gift of God, not something that we can earn. He was bothered by the church's selling of indulgences, gifts to the church to assure salvation, or at least a quick trip to purgatory. He was bothered by the church's accumulation of money and property and its seeming interest in cultivating the favor of

the governments and empires more than the care of souls and concern for the poor. The Lutheran Reformation spread throughout northern Germany and the Scandinavian countries. Wars broke out, including the Thirty Years' War.

Luther kept the order of the Mass, the emphasis on both Word and sacrament, and the lectionary and liturgical year. He used local languages rather than Latin, which led to his translation of the Bible into German and his development of congregational hymnody. His theology is best summarized by the idea of salvation by grace alone, by “sola scriptura,” that is authority comes from scripture and not from the church's tradition, and the priesthood of all believers, that we are all called to ministry by our baptism. These ideas also influenced the Swiss Reformation.

By 1519, Ulrich Zwingli, influenced by Luther, began preaching the Reformation in his church in Zurich, Switzerland. He placed great emphasis on the preaching of the Word, even abolishing the use of music and visual arts in church. He stopped following the lectionary and church year and began preaching through books of the Bible. He eventually reduced the serving of communion to four times a year.

The center of the Swiss Reformation eventually settled in Geneva, where John Calvin (1509-1574) had fled to escape persecution in France. Calvin differed from Zwingli on many issues, but he also differed from Luther on several matters. Luther and Zwingli held a debate on the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Luther held that Christ could be everywhere at once and therefore was present in the communion. Zwingli saw the sacrament as a remembrance of what Jesus did for us, but did not feel his presence in the meal. I have often thought that if Luther and Calvin had debated, the two traditions might have grown together, for Calvin believed in weekly celebration of communion. He believed that Christ was present in the meal by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Calvin was not successful in convincing the Genevan authorities to serve communion weekly, but he arranged for it to be offered in one of the churches in town each week. All the Reformers believed that worshippers should commune regularly and that they should receive both the bread and wine. The medieval priests celebrated the sacrament many times a day, but the people usually partook only at Easter. The Reformers believed that Christ's sacrifice was offered

once on the cross, where the medieval church taught that the sacrifice was repeated each time the Eucharist was celebrated.

Calvin also developed a pattern of preaching through books of the Bible rather than following a lectionary and the church year. Calvin is most remembered for his doctrine of Predestination, where the Elect were chosen from the beginning of time and one could not earn salvation. We no longer emphasize that belief in the PCUSA.

On the continent of Europe, a more radical Reformation arose, the Anabaptists. They did not believe that infants should be baptized, but that one should show signs of faith before receiving the sacraments. The Baptists, the Mennonites, and the Amish are descendants of this tradition, though most Baptists also are influenced by Calvin. They believe in strict separation of church and state and they seek a purified church, without sin.

In England, the Reformation was begun by Henry VIII and it had little to do with theology, doctrine or worship style. It was mostly about Henry's personal issues, his wish to divorce his wives and remarry. Later, the split between the

Church of England and the Puritans had much to do with the use of the Book of Common Prayer vs a more free style of worship, and an emphasis on purification of the church.

How do we fit in with this picture? John Knox (c.1514-1572) was a priest in England and later in Scotland. He began to identify with various Protestant ideas, which led to his disagreement with Catholic monarchs, especially women. He was a prisoner of war and a galley slave during a conflict between Scotland and France. Eventually he was exiled from Scotland, where he went to Geneva. He studied under Calvin and pastored an English speaking congregation there. In May, 1559, when it was safe to go back, he returned to Scotland. He became the pastor at St. Giles Cathedral in Edinburgh. Presbyterianism arose in Scotland under his leadership. The main thing that sets Presbyterians apart is that they officially ordain elders and deacons, their lay leadership, so that there is more of a balance of power between lay people and clergy. Much of Knox's theology is taken from Calvin, so our roots also lie in the Swiss Reformation. The Scottish "Book of Common Order" is considered the people's book, not just for a priestly caste, but for everyone. In recent years, the Church

of Scotland has been greatly influenced by members of the Iona Community on a Western Island off the coast of Scotland. Members do not stay in a monastic setting but serve churches and social service agencies throughout the country.

My ancestors on my mother's side come from the Scots-Irish tradition, people who fled Scotland during the Clearances and settled in Northern Ireland, and then later migrated to the United States. My mother was born in Kentucky and attended a Cumberland Presbyterian church.

We have not emphasized Reformation Day so much in the Presbyterian Church in recent years, in part because we did not want to emphasize the divisions between our various traditions. However, much has changed and this anniversary has become an occasion for us to come together. Thursday night Catholics and Lutherans who are associated with the ELCA came together to celebrate the signing in 1992 of an agreement on justification by faith and grace. I attended this service, and I believe we need more ecumenical work like this.

The World Council of Churches was founded in 1948. It began to encourage many dialogues among different Protestant traditions on such subjects as baptism, eucharist

and ministry. Then in the 1960s, the Second Vatican Council was held. The Roman Church declared that ecumenism was in the interests of all the churches, including the ones they had labeled the “separated brethren.” Since then many agreements have been reached. Most of us now agree that we can recognize each other’s baptisms and that we do not need to “rebaptize” a person who comes from another tradition. Some of us have agreed to share in the Eucharist, though there is not yet agreement between Roman Catholics and Protestants on that. Here, we have made much use of the common agreement that was reached between Presbyterians, the United Church of Christ, the ELCA Lutherans, and the Reformed Church in America. We can now share in ministry, we are welcome at each other’s tables, and we recognize one another’s baptism. So we have had Lutheran and UCC clergy among our pulpit guests this year.

I served for 13 years on the Unity and Relationships Committee of the Wisconsin Council of Churches. Our mission was to promote unity among the churches and to seek relationships with non-Christian traditions. The committee issued a study guide “Loving our Interfaith Neighbors.”

I believe that our churches have been enriched by the interchange we have had with other traditions. Since Vatican II, we have begun using the lectionary and the church year in our worship and preaching. We now use the Revised Common Lectionary, which was an ecumenical effort. We have revised our worship resources and the Directory for Worship in our Book of Order so that they remain Reformed but are more ecumenical in nature. Presbyterians now average once a month in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper. There are some Presbyterian churches that celebrate it weekly. We emphasize that we are baptized into the universal catholic church rather than a particular denomination. Catholic churches have greatly enriched their Bible study and preaching of the Word. They don’t use the same lectionary, but it is very similar. They now use vernacular languages and their congregational singing is much better. I hope as we celebrate this 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation that we will all seek more unity, more common mission, and more ministry together. May we be Reformed and always reforming!