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Reformation Sunday
November 1, 2009
Prince of Peace Lutheran Church
Hecla, SD

Text: 1 Kings 8:57-58 ***“May the LORD our God be with us, as He was with our fathers. May He not leave us nor forsake us, that He may incline our hearts to Himself, to walk in all His ways, and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, which He commanded our fathers.”***

Theme: Our Reformation Prayer - “May the LORD Our God Be With Us”
- Who preserved the saints in past
- To guide our footsteps in the future

Dear fellow children of the Reformation, fellow redeemed in Christ Jesus,

So what is the purpose of having a Reformation Sunday? Each year, on the Sunday closest to October 31 we have a service with the title “Reformation” in it. For years, CLC members in the Dakotas and Minnesota have traveled 100's of miles to attend a special Reformation Festival service in their area. Today in Bowdle we even have a speaker that will be coming from nearly 500 miles away to preach. But why? Why do we make such a big deal about the Reformation? What is the purpose of these services? Is the purpose merely to look back at what God accomplished through Martin Luther almost 500 years ago? Do we set this Sunday aside just so we have an excuse to sing, “A Mighty Fortress is Our God?”

There is value in looking back to see where we have come from. As we mark the 50th Anniversary of the CLC this year, there will be some looking back in recognition and praise to God for where we have come from. So too with our Lutheran heritage and the Lutheran Reformation. We do look back to see what God has accomplished and praise His name for it. But we don't merely want to look back, we need to pay attention to the road ahead of us! So on this Reformation Sunday, we do want to look back and consider what all that our faithful God did to preserve the saints of long ago and pray that the LORD our God would also be with us. But as our focus is on the road that lie ahead of us as Christians and Lutherans, we also pray that the LORD our God would be with us to guide our footsteps in the future. Let us therefore offer up our Reformation prayer: “May the LORD our God be with us!”

WHO PRESERVED THE SAINTS IN THE PAST

The words of our text this morning come from one of the high points in the history of the Children of Israel. These words were spoken by Solomon upon the dedication of the Temple in Jerusalem. God had settled the Children of Israel in the land He had promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He had given them victories over the inhabitants of the land of Canaan and all their enemies. He had established the throne of His servant David and his son Solomon had succeeded him. And now they had a permanent worship location in Jerusalem to worship the LORD their God which King Solomon is now dedicating. As Solomon considers the future which lay ahead of God's people, he first directs their attention to history and says, ***“May the***

LORD our God be with us, as He was with our fathers.”

When we read through the Old Testament we hear how again and again, God was with those saints of the past. How God was with Abraham as he left his homeland to a land he knew nothing about, but which God promised to give as an inheritance to his offspring. How God was with Joseph when he was sold into slavery by his brothers and wrongfully thrown into prison. How God raised Joseph up and caused him to be, essentially, the vice-president of Egypt. How God used Joseph’s position to protect Jacob and his family during a harsh famine.

Or how hundreds of years later, when Pharaoh and his mighty Egyptian army were pursuing the Children of Israel and about to over take them. God was with them. He parted the Red Sea and allowed the Children of Israel to pass safely through, but the waters of the Red Sea came crashing down, destroying the Egyptian army. How God was with the army of the Children of Israel as they entered the promised land of Canaan. Remember how He caused the walls of Jericho to come tumbling down? Or remember how young, little David slew the mighty giant Goliath with a sling and a stone? God was with their fathers. He preserved those saints of the past. And Solomon prays as they dedicate the temple, that the LORD would be with them as well.

Yesterday was October 31, a day that most in the world means costumes and candy. But for orthodox Lutherans it means something much more. It was on October 31, 1517 that a monk by the name of Martin Luther nailed his ninety-five theses or statements on the church door in Wittenberg. These were 95 sentences against the sale of indulgences - an act by the Church in Rome to essentially buy and sell forgiveness from the Pope. At this time, the Roman Catholic Church was, for all intents and purposes, the only Christian church in Europe. This event on October 31 of 1517 essentially began what we refer to as the Lutheran Reformation.

Was God with Martin Luther? Yes, indeed! In 1520 Martin Luther was excommunicated by the Roman Catholic Church. A year later, in 1521, when lowly monk Luther stood before the Emperor and refused to recant - or take back - his writings and teachings, Luther was declared to be an outlaw - an enemy of the state. Anyone could kill Luther and would face no punishment.

But God was with Luther and preserved this saint. Though there was nothing to prevent anyone from killing Luther, God preserved his life. God had much more work for Luther to do. By the gifts God gave Luther, Luther was able to translate the Bible into the language of the people - German, rather than the language of the Church - Latin. Luther put together a catechism, a summary of Christian doctrine which parents could use to teach their children. This catechism we use with our children today. Luther, working together with other Christian men, put together the Formula of Concord. A number of doctrinal statements on what the Bible teaches and rejecting what is false. God was with Luther and the band of men that broke from the Roman Catholic Church and followed the Word instead. God preserved these saints of the past.

As we mark the 50th Anniversary of our CLC we look back and remark at how God was with the founders of our church body. Around the mid to late 1950's, many conservative Lutherans began to see that the church bodies that they had grown up in were not being faithful to the Word of God. The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod was drifting from the Word and fellowshiping with false teaching church bodies. When the Wisconsin Synod failed to take action, many left the Missouri Synod and Wisconsin Synod. This meant they left the churches they had grown up in. It even left some families doctrinally divided. Some pastors left the churches they had been serving. Some students left the Lutheran schools they were attending. Where would they go to worship? What would they do?

But the LORD our God was with them. A new church body was formed called “Church of the Lutheran Confession.” Congregations around the nation and around the world began to join this new, little church body. The founders of the CLC knew that Christian Education was vital for the future of the CLC. Here too, the LORD was with them. After much prayer Immanuel Lutheran College was organized in the basement of Immanuel Church in Mankato, MN. After more prayer, the LORD made available 75 acres of land in Eau Claire, WI for roughly \$85,000. Property which already had usable buildings and even a dormitory. The LORD our God preserved and blessed these saints of the past.

We do not know what the future will hold for us as Christians, for us as members of Prince of Peace, or for the CLC in the next 50 years. Will this church body drift from the Word of God? If history teaches us anything, the CLC will probably not always be an orthodox body. What will we do? Will we be? But we know this much we want God to be with us. We join Solomon as we offer our Reformation prayer, **“May the LORD our God be with us, as He was with our fathers. May He not leave us nor forsake us.”** Without God’s blessing and presence nothing we do will be of any value. **“Without Me you can do nothing,”** Jesus said. (Jn 15:5)

None of our works are pleasing in God’s sight. But with God on our side, nothing is impossible. Indeed God is with us. He is on our side to save us and give us eternal life. He has placed His Holy Spirit into our hearts, whereby we know we are children of God. We have been baptized into His name. He gave us His beloved Son Jesus as our Savior from sin. He is “Immanuel” - “God with us.” Jesus has promised that where two or three are gathered together in His name, He is with them in the midst of them. Therefore we conclude with the Apostle Paul, **“If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?”** (Rom 8:31-32) Paul points us to the cross and says that if God loved so that much, that He would deliver His Son into death for our sins, what is there He won’t He do for us? He took care of our biggest problem of sin what will He not help us with. Therefore as we face an uncertain future we pray that the LORD our God who preserved those saints of the past would also be with us.

TO GUIDE OUR FOOTSTEPS IN THE FUTURE

As Solomon dedicates the Temple, he knows well that for this people to prosper they would need the LORD’s aid. And more than just His aid, Solomon knew that they would need the LORD to cause them to walk in His Word. Solomon’s prayer continues, **“That He may incline our hearts to Himself, to walk in all His ways, and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, which He commanded our fathers.”** (v.58) The force of Solomon’s words are something like saying, “May the LORD cause our hearts to turn to Himself.” Solomon wants the LORD to work in the hearts of His people that they may be faithful to Him and His Word. The LORD needs to do this work or they will fail.

This is our Reformation prayer, that the LORD our God would be with us to guide our footsteps in the future. As we said earlier, we don’t know what the future holds for us as believers in Christ, as a congregation, or as a church body. What we do know is that we want to be faithful to our God. We neither want to turn to the right or to the left from His Word. We know there are many false teachers in the world, who are in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. False teaching wolves of whom Jesus warns us to “beware of.” We do not want to be enticed to follow them. We want to walk in all His ways. We want to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments. We want to be faithful to Him and serve

Him only.

But we realize that we are very weak. We know we can easily be enticed by the smooth words and flattering speech of false teachers. We know that we have disobeyed the commandments, statutes, and judgments of our God. With the Apostle Paul we are frustrated as we find, *the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice.* (Rom 7:19) The very commandments that we long to keep, we find we break. The very sins we don't want to commit, that we find ourselves doing. With Paul we cry out, "***O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?***" (Rom 7:24) Wretched indeed. We know God's will. Most of us are able recite all 10 of His Commandments. Yet we can also recite the ways we have broken them!

But Paul takes us once again to the cross of Christ. Who will deliver me from this body of death? "***I thank God -- through Jesus Christ our Lord!***" (Rom 7:25a) God delivers us through Jesus Christ our Lord. All of our weaknesses, failings, and short-comings were placed on God's own beloved Son and He was punished for the evil that we have done and the good that we have left undone. By His death and resurrection from the dead God has already made the proclamation about us - "not guilty." We are justified by grace through faith in Christ Jesus. Thank God, indeed!

Yet we do not want to use our failings in the past as an excuse for the future. Our new man of faith longs to run the way of God's commandments (Ps 119:32). We want to faithfully serve God our Savior. We want to do the bidding of our Father because we love Him. We want to let the light of our faith shine that we may bring glory to His name. However if left to our own strength we will fail. We need God to do work this in our lives. We need God to incline our hearts to Himself. With Solomon we offer this Reformation prayer, "May the LORD our God be with us to guide our footsteps in the future."

What is Reformation Sunday about? It is about turning to God for help. Looking to His Gospel for our salvation and life. Praying for His presence in our lives even as He was with the saints of the past. Praying that He would keep us steadfast in His word for years to God. May the LORD our God be with us! Amen.