

October 25, 2020

Semper Reformanda / Semper Fi!

Grace mercy and peace be to you from God our Father from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Well as I mentioned at our scripture reading this is both the 21st Sunday of Pentecost, but also Reformation Sunday. A Sunday that is set apart to celebrate what happened on October 31st, 1517. That is when like Jesus, Luther challenged the religious authorities. He did this by nailing 95 theses, that is 95 complaints or corrections that he had written out; he nailed them to the Castle church door in Wittenberg. This was not something that was a sign of disrespect. This is where, at that time, it was like a community bulletin board. Almost everybody went to church and so if you had an announcement to make, you would post it up on the church door. This is exactly what Luther did.

But these 95 theses or corrections, complaints; were focused on what the church was doing and teaching. The church was preaching what we would call works righteousness; that by doing the following things you could earn your way to heaven or earn or pay the way to heaven for others. Luther's point was we can't work our self to heaven. We are saved by grace, through faith. It is righteousness by faith. In John 8:31 to 32. Jesus tells the Pharisees, 'if you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.

The very first word, if, puts a condition on what Jesus says, if you abide in His word, then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. This was the premise for the Reformation. Getting to the truth or getting back to the truth that is found in God's Word. Through Luther, and let's be honest through John Wycliff, who many times called the first Protestant and was over 100 years before Luther. Through John Hust, who was 102 years before Luther. In fact, 102 years earlier, he was burned at the stake for trying to get the truth out into the church. And William Tyndale, who also was burned at the stake for trying to bring the truth, God's Word back into the church. Nineteen years before Luther, he also was burned at the stake.

So really, when we talk about reformation, we need to talk about Luther, Wycliff, Hust and Tyndall. All of these, all four of them, over the course of about 200 years opened the door. They opened the door for John Calvin and Ulrich Zwingli, the reformers that; well Calvin started in France; both of them ended up in Geneva Switzerland and became the founding fathers of the Reformed Church. Also, John and Charles Wesley who in England, began what is now known as the Methodist church. Or John Knox who was in Scotland and began what is now known as the Presbyterian Church. Then there is also another person this open the door for guys in the Netherlands, Desideria Erasmus. He is the one who first took the scriptures and translated them back into the Greek. Karl Barth theologian from the early 20th century, took note of what had happened in the Reformation 500 years earlier; and he noted and he said, “the church must always be reformed.” That simple phrase of his, has now become the phrase, much like we have in our Marine core, “Semper Fi,” “Semper Reformanda.” And just like “semper fi” means always faithful or always loyal to; “semper reformanda,” means always reform or always reforming.

Now this isn't something that's saying the church needs to always be changing. No, it actually was a commentary by Karl Barth on mankind. That we have a very difficult time staying true to God's Word, and we tend to always be drifting away. Therefore, there is always a need to be reforming and coming back to God's Words. Reforming against man's efforts, to make the religious experience, Christianity, the teachings of the Bible well to be more palatable and in line with culture at the time.

You know when Karl Barth wrote this, he was in the midst of Nazi Germany and man was trying to push his way into the church and make a quote “German church” that would support the Nazism of Adolf Hitler. This is why Karl Barth said, ‘the church always needs to be reforming, or be ready to reform.’ And yet, at the same time, I think we could take that motto of the US Marines “semper fi” always loyal, always faithful to, and apply it to the church as well. When we are we forming, taking on the errors, that man has brought into the church, we must be “semper fi” always loyal, always faithful to the Scriptures. After all, when it comes to the scriptures in John 17:17, our Lord and Savior, in His high priestly prayer, prays for His disciples, and prays for us saying, “Sanctify them in the truth, Your Word is truth.” Jesus Himself was

loyal to God's Word and the reforming or transforming power that it brings with it.

That's where Jesus was when He's talking in John chapter eight, with the Pharisees and with those who were also following them where He tells them about being free. He's addressing what the Pharisees said; they said to him we are offspring of Abraham and have never been slave to anyone. How is it that you say, 'you will become free?' They say this to Him because he had said, 'you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.' When we think about that, this is not so uncommon. When the Pharisees come back and say we are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone they've forgotten their history. After all, they are the Hebrew nation they had been enslaved by the Egyptians. They had been enslaved by the Assyrians. They had been enslaved by the Babylonians, by the Persians, by the Greeks, and they presently were enslaved by the Romans. But none of that sounds good to talk about being enslaved to something so they just they took it out of their history. That is very common. After all, Winston Churchill said, "A nation that forgets its past, has no future." He said that because he saw it was a common thing within countries, they forgot their history. Philosopher, George Santayana says, "Those who forget the past, are condemned to repeat it." He was a Spanish fellow who had moved to England. What did he see? People rewriting history to take away what they don't want to remember, but they really could learn from. In fact, the German philosopher Hegel said, "What experience and history teaches is this; that people and government have never learned anything from history or act on principles deduced from it." Wow, people have never learned from their history. They rewrite it. In fact, if we go to Lenin; in his writing titled *The Heritage we Renounce*, Lenin writes; "He must know that those people do not acknowledge any continuity with the past and emphatically renounce their heritage." This concept of forgetting history that might be for us an inconvenient truth, is historical. It's historical, as Jesus pointed out with the religious leaders of that time, forgetting that the children of Israel had over and over been enslaved because they kept turning from God. It's a history that we can record and see in the church. It's why we had a Reformation; because man forgot his history or the history of the church and took the church and turned it into something that was self-serving.

When we look back in history, at every great country in empire, we see that on the average they last only 200 years and they collapse. In fact, I remember back in college, learning about the 10 steps a nation or empire goes through before it falls. I would dare say we can say the exact same thing about the church. Now again, consider that this is what I was taught 40 years ago. See if this doesn't sound kind of true both in the church and in our country. Step one in a nation, is going from bondage to spiritual faith. Putting that in the context of our country, we were under the rule of England. The people who came here were under the rule of individuals in Europe. Why did they leave? So that they would have religious freedom. And again, think about the Christian Church. The basic teachings of the Church tell us that we are in bondage to sin, but that through Christ, and faith in Him, we are free. There is step one, going from bondage to spiritual faith.

Step two is from spiritual faith to great courage. It took a lot of courage for the founders of our country to first of all, leave their homes in Europe and sail across the Atlantic. It took even more courage then, to stand up to England and say, 'no more.' But they had great courage. We see that often times as people become Christians, and they've realized that they are freed from sin, they are fired up, they are ready to rock and roll and be evangelists and share this good news with everyone. Step two is spiritual faith to great courage.

Step three, great courage to Liberty. Because of the actions of men like George Washington, Samuel Adams, Daniel Webster, Patrick Henry we have freedom. We, as a church, as we embrace that wonderful message that we are saved by grace through faith; we are freed from the effects of the law, we've got Liberty. And what joy there is in Liberty!

And Step four is Liberty to abundance. When you are liberated, you can work and you can go, and you take a look at our country and it is so true. We became a country of great abundance because you were free. Free to prove, to pursue your passions, free to pursue your business, free to invent. And within the Church, we are free to worship, free to study God's Word. We have an abundance, a beautiful church, an organ, and for hymns, a piano. There so much so much available to us as Christians!

But from abundance, we go to selfishness. I think we've seen that happening over the last 100 years or so in our country. As people become selfish, and I want it, I want it, and I don't want to share it. I want it for me, and I want the glory, and I want the power, I want to be in politics, I want the power, and I want to be able to rule. And we see that same kind of selfishness can worm its way into the church. As people become selfish, and I want this, and I want this, and I want this.

From selfishness we go to complacency. As long as I'm getting what I want, giddy up! We've seen that happening within both country and within the Christian Church at large. You know as long as we're free to worship, as long as we're free to be us, it's cool, let's not rock the boat. And from complacency we go to apathy. I mean, who really cares? Who really cares whether there's a Democrat in the White House or Republican in the White House? Who really cares about you know, all these different issues? Let's just let that go and let the politicians take care of it. Or in the church, who really cares? Who cares about infant baptism, who cares about doctrine? who cares about what the Bible says? I mean, we're all good people, right?

And from apathy, we go to moral decay. This is what we heard about in the sermon two weeks ago from Isaiah; where light becomes dark, evil becomes good. Because we've lost the focus of what makes something good or bad; right or wrong. It's the Creator who determines that! But from moral decay, we see a turn to dependence, trust man. Depend on this institution or depend on this individual to lead you to happiness and joy again. That happens in both the church and in the country. But the minute you start to depend on man, you have put man in the position of God to care for you and provide for you and man has a terrible time dealing with that kind of power. Dependence, and I note this, dependence quickly turns to bondage and you become a slave to that or to whom you became dependent upon.

And so, the question is where is the Church universal, the Christian Church today? Where is our country, the United States of America today are we at step 9, and the transition from moral decay to dependence? Or are we in step 10 in the transition from dependence to bondage? And see this is exactly what Jesus was dealing with in First Century Israel. They were wholly dependent on the religious leaders who had made them servants, slaves held them in bondage to their man-made laws. It's what happened in the 16th

Century in the church where again man had put their total trust in the Pope, and in the priesthood to take care of everything for them and they were now in bondage to the teachings of the Pope the priesthood the Vatican and it was all self-serving for those who were in power. I see the exact same thing happening in both our country and the Church today.

Now that takes us to the gospel reading for today. When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees; this is what we heard about last week. The last thing He dealt with was the Sadducees and that whole story about a woman and seven brothers and whose will she be in the resurrection. When Jesus silenced them by saying, 'You are wrong. You haven't read the scriptures. Don't you know what the scripture says? God says, 'I am the God of Abraham, I am the God of Isaac, I am the God of Jacob.' He is the God of the living not the dead. When He silenced the Sadducees with that, the Pharisees heard it and they gathered together. Notice their disciples, who they had sent to deal with Jesus last week, aren't there. They go to Jesus, and we read; 'and one of them a lawyer, this would be a scribe of the Pharisees, asked Him (that is Jesus) a question to test Him. Just like last week to try to entangle Him in His words, and he says, "teacher," which is the greatest commandment in the law? Jesus consolidates the first table of the law and says, "You shall love the Lord your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment." And notice how Jesus said that, you are to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind. It's trinitarian in nature. We were created in the image of God, and just as God is totally unified, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we in our love of God; we are to be totally unified. Personally, that I love God above all else, and corporately that as a congregation we love God above all else and put Him above all others. This, Jesus says, is the foundation that everything is built on.

And you know what? Today that is called a meta narrative in the philosophy of today which is called post modernism. I did a lot of reading on postmodernism this last week and you know what one of the tenets of postmodernism is? I quote, and this is both from a philosopher at Stanford and a philosopher at Harvard, "eliminate meta narratives." So, the goal of the philosophical, educated, elite today, which is postmodernism is to eliminate meta narratives. The big story, that there is a God, He acts in our lives, and we jolly well better look back at history, learn from it, so that we can do better.

You know, in the past, before this postmodern world hit us, just in the last 40 years or so really. It was always an issue of 'the gods.' When we look at the scriptures, the scriptures point out, who are you going to believe a stone god? that's what someone chiseled out, like a god made of wood, that's what someone carved out. We don't worship that. We worship the living God, who spoke and brought creation into existence.

Today our philosophical mindset is, there is no God. All of those are meta narratives that were made by people to take advantage of others. It's all about you, and you decide what narrative you're going to make of yourself. Wow! This is the mindset we're fighting with; we are at war with. And yet we have to remember that Jesus didn't stop with love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind. This is the first and great command. He goes right into the next thing, without the Pharisees even having a chance to talk. He says, 'and a second is like it, you shall love your neighbor as yourself.' How is that like the first commandment? Because it's asking you to love your neighbor, just as you love God. Love your neighbor with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind. It's a message of servanthood. That it's not all about me. It is about God and about those He has created, and He has put us here to serve them. It's totally against what Society is teaching today. It's totally against the philosophy of the educated elite. It's all about servant hood what Jesus did.

And so this Reformation Sunday we hear the call "semper reformanda" and "semper fi!" It is time to reform from being in bondage to the culture, to the higher education, to the government control, that is around us and to put our total focus into loving and trusting God. He alone, is our leader. And it is time for "semper fi," to be loyal to His word from which all morality should be based. It's a respect for the Creator, who knows what is best. It is that Scripture that calls on us to love. To love God, to love our neighbor. You might say, 'oh but pastor Matt, loving our neighbor today; it's so hard there's cancel culture. They just cancel us right out!' And you know, I'd like to take you back to the words of Peter, the hothead disciple. In first Peter 4 verse eight, he says "love covers a multitude of sins." And dear brothers and sisters in Christ there's a lot of in this world and it's getting uglier as we are transitioning from dependence to bondage or from moral decay to dependence; but what is needed really is love. The love of God the Father through Jesus Christ in our lives.

Because then we take that love, His love into this world. Listen, please listen!
It might be the last example of real love this world sees.

We are entrusted with the Scriptures. We are entrusted with our Lord's Church and its mission, and we are entrusted with His love. So, let's show each other and let's show the community around us; our neighbors, our friends, those who are protesting; let's show them true agape, servant-based love that listens to them, that puts them first. It also cares enough to bring them the truth of God's Word.

In our Savior's Name, Amen