

...*but now*.... A sermon preached on Reformation Sunday, October 28, 2018 at St. Giles' Presbyterian Church, Prince George, BC by Rev. Herb Hilder.

Lessons JEREMIAH 31:31-34
ROMANS 3:19-26

Every European history course I took at university in which the 15th and 16th century were part of the course,

There was one seminar and often one compulsory exam question on this topic –*the differences between Reformation Europe and 20th century North America.*

And as good students we would list or catalogue those differences

- North America was not even known by most Europeans in the 15th and 16th centuries
- The idea of successful democracy seemed inconceivable in Reformation Europe
- Europe was for the most part a crazy quilt like pattern of territories and principalities under the Holy Roman Empire. The Germany of say Martin Luther does not even begin to resemble

what we know as Germany today until the middle of the 19th century

- In Reformation Europe, political equality was synonymous to chaos.
- Religious toleration was not much in vogue in Reformation Europe – which is why for instance many of Luther's and the other Reformers writings contain within them incidents of appalling religious intolerance – especially of the Jews.

I expect that examination question is still asked, though now through revisionist history lenses.

And today many branches of the Protestant church are – still marking the Martin Luther's contribution and impact on the church for over 500 years.

Is this because we have nostalgia big time for this late medieval monk and his writings.

No, I believe not.

Rather I believe that Martin Luther continues to be spoken about, reflected upon, his commentaries on Biblical books and a host of other topics continue to be read because in the end it is virtually impossible to imagine how Western Christianity would have evolved had Luther never taken the actions he did.

Let us be very clear, Martin Luther was often unhappy with the direction the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century was taking. The violence and persecution that went with it – including the Catholic Inquisition – upset him greatly.

Luther never intended to “split the Roman Church”

But at the same time, he could not be quiet about the church’s abuses and how far the Church had and continued to drift from the scriptures by the 16th century.

And so his words set in motion irreversible changes to the religious ways it had always been done,

Who had always had the authority and power
To re-examine who was really the head of the church – and this is Jesus Christ, not some worldly elected individual!

What I have realized in a new light – though I am not certain how my history professors at Brock University would have dealt with it; is all the relative historical differences between 16th c Reformation Europe and us today are beside the point.

There will always be differences between one time period and another.

And while it is good to know those differences – particularly if you want to do

well in a course in which the question about differences is asked,

I now find myself asking the question – what are the connections between this late Medieval monk named Martin Luther and us today?

Why do we still mark his work on the last Sunday in October?

Because, Luther's rediscovery as it were through his studies, teachings, personal wrestling with demons of inadequacy before God was *the grace of God in Jesus Christ*.

Certainly, Luther's way of expressing that grace

The specific conditions into which he sought to bring the light of that grace – the wrongness of papal indulgences and like matters –

They were relative to his historical situation
But THE GRACE to which Luther pointed –

God's gift in Christ – *everything we have is an unmerited gift from a God who loves us and therefore seeks any and all means to bring us into a right relationship with Him*

Is as meaningful today – maybe even more so as it was to Luther's world.

Why? Because the voices of this world continue to chirp and beguile us to believe

that all we have and all we do is of our own doing.

Our society and culture is dominated by a “do by self” attitude and approach

This is very much “it’s all about ME!” world.

It’s all about blaming others – for I could never be wrong. It’s always someone else’s fault.

I have told you about the discussion with the person who was convinced that her point of view, her opinion was the only one.

I knew this person was wrong, but rather than reverting to being blunt and saying, you are wrong, I decided to take a little higher road and I said, “Have you ever thought that maybe, just maybe you might be wrong about something?”

I guess that was too not to the point, because this person responded, “No, I never have thought about that, because I never make mistakes.”

I am seeing this scenario – never making mistakes more and more.

Sadly, I am hearing it more and more from people in political power at many levels.

It’s not my fault,

I am not to blame.

I am always right is their constant response to questions.

For the majority of us who know that such people and ourselves are created a little lower than the angels,

The grace of God in Jesus Christ remains a liberating and humbling truth in our lives.

How so?

The Grace of God in Jesus Christ frees us from seeing our own sense of worth *solely in terms of how the world sees worth and worthiness.*

Too often the world sees these things solely in terms of how much money and worldly goods we have

What we do

The power we wield.

Sooner or later we realize the emptiness of that definition of worth and worthiness.

For we cannot always jump through all the hoops

Always balance all the responsibilities and expectations

Things happen! Life is difficult! Sometimes things beyond our control cause goals and plans to change – often dramatically.

Have you ever noticed how the world and the voices of the world are so very quick and very good at conveying that somehow we are now redundant, unnecessary and a surplus

How useless we now must be and feel

WORTH based on the Grace of God in Jesus Christ reminds us that *your sense of self-worth, my sense of self-worth comes from being created and saved by God's love.*

Worth then is not measured by trying harder to be good, kind, nice people – though that is important too!

Grace says – each of you are worthy of my (God's) love by the death of my son (Jesus).

Believe in that.

Live in that light.

Make your decisions, hold your views and observe things around you in that light

Do you fully comprehend what a sea change occurs when we can see others – particularly our brothers and sisters in Christ – as worthy as much of the love and grace of God as we are.

Can we see the paradigm shift when we realize that Jesus died on a Cross as much for that person or those people who are not “your sort” as much as he died for you?

Yet, how often do we run ourselves ragged, Believing that God will love us MORE if we DO MORE and more things?

If we try harder and harder to please God by actions and works?

Sadly – what happens more often than not – it certainly happened in Luther's life,

The harder he tried to please God,
 The more convinced Luther became that he
 was not worthy...so much so that he did
 almost go mad!

UNTIL the insight in Paul's letters –
 specifically chapters 1, 3 of his letter to the
 Romans – hit him

WE ARE FORGIVEN

WE ARE MADE RIGHT WITH GOD – not
 owing to our actions,

But owing to God's initiative for us

You are forgiven. I can live as a forgiven by
 God person

That is incredibly liberating – for it helps each
 of us step off the hamster wheel of doing good
 works.

The grace of God is also a *humbling*
truth.

For it is a reminder that it is GOD WHO IS
 THE INITIATOR—from John's Gospel

**– you did not choose me, but I chose you to
 go and bear good fruit.**

And we are not chosen by God because we
 earned it,

Or paid for it,

Or even asked for it

Rather, God's grace comes as a gift to all who
 believe

And that is *humbling* – because it reminds us that we are not the centre – GOD IS

God is the planner

God is the initiator

God provides this way of getting right with him

God provides everything – needs and a considerable number of wants.

One of the best known preachers of God's grace in Jesus was the former slave trader, turned Anglican priest, John Newton.

The hymn for which he is best known is much overworked and overdone

However, its words still pack a punch

Humility before God cascades through the verses

*Amazing grace, how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.*

*Through many dangers, toils and snares,
I have already come;
'tis grace has brought me safe thus far,
And grace will lead me home.*

Certainly much has changed since Luther's reflections and applied convictions turned the then established church on its ear.

And forced it to change many of its
hidebound and ossified ways.

What has not changed is the message by
God through the work of Christ.

Then reaffirmed by St. Paul

By Luther

By all the reformers

By John Newton and by others since

God alone saves

*We are utterly without hope, save for the
grace of God in Jesus Christ*

Truly,

*'tis grace has brought me safe thus far,
And grace will lead me home. AMEN*