



THE REFORMATION ANCIENT HISTORY OR SOMETHING OF VALUE? SUNDAY, OCTOBER 25TH, 2020



MARTIN LUTHER 1483-1546

In the next two weeks we will focus upon two high points of the Christian calendar: the first, today, the Reformation that falls on October 31st each year, and the second, “All Saints Day”, that has been pretty much seized by American and now more broadly western identity as “Halloween”.

Today, as we think about the Reformation and what it may have to say to a very different world from and in which it was born, we could characterize Protestant identity that resulted from it, in a number of ways: some more adequate than others. One way, is the idea that to be Protestant means you are not Catholic. This is certainly something that stuck in the Anglo-Celtic world, reinforcing cultural and political conflicts. Another way in which Protestant identity has been expressed has been through particular doctrines – especially the doctrine of “justification by grace through faith”, which was a great leveller in a world of class differentiation, since it spelled out the idea that we have no point from which we can legitimately justify ourselves before God and even each other. The bitter irony of this doctrinal belief was that, it was used precisely to do what it sought to resist – the building of a creedal identity against other Christians from other parts of the Church – Catholic and Orthodox.

In our liturgy today, I want to take up what I think is important to Protestant identity: what the post-World War II theologian, Paul Tillich called the “Protestant Principle”

GATHERING

Announcements

We prepare ourselves: Confitemini Domino – Our God is able (Taizé) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SsWgvtQ5dgs>

Lighting the Candle

Greeting

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit
The Lord be with you
and also with you

Hymn: A mighty fortress is our God (TiS 103, Martin Luther, Ein Feste Burg)

A Community Prayer: Building Meaning

O God, we are all immersed in history: products of it and shapers of it. We hear in the Bible that you are the God of history: in it and above it. Help us to discern you in history and in our historical processes. Help us to contribute to history, the things that we believe you stand for.

Help us build meaning

O Jesus, we carry the mark of the Protestant tradition in us and with us. It speaks of our relationship with you through what you did for us. It speaks of how you restore us and make us whole. It speaks of a renewed personal conscience and maturity as you face us and we face you.

Help us build meaning

O Spirit, help us to live out our Christian faith through the lens of an informed Protestantism, with wisdom, with critical awareness of our own tradition, embracing our faith in Christ first and foremost.

Help us build meaning

Our Confession and Reconciliation

Let us be still and listen to the voice of God

Silence

O God, we confess our limitedness, oblivious to the history and traditions which knock on our door: Western, Eastern: Anglo-Saxon, Korean, Singaporean, Sri Lankan, Japanese, Latin American, South African.

O Jesus, we confess our lack of perception about the forms of Christian tradition in which we are wrapped: Western, Eastern, Catholic, Protestant, Western Protestant, Eastern Protestant, Liberal, Evangelical, Pentecostal.

O Spirit, we confess the way in which we live locked into narrowness and dogmatism, lacking in curiosity of the broader way you work in the world with those whose lives are lived through other theologies and philosophies.

We confess that you are so much bigger than us.

Mend our narrowness and resurrect our creativity

Amen

The Peace

SMG

Anecdotal Insights about Protestant Identity



“I cannot choose but adhere to the word of God, which has possession of my conscience; nor can I possibly, nor will I even make any recantation, since it is neither safe nor honest to act contrary to conscience! Here I stand; I cannot do otherwise, so help me God! Amen.”

Martin Luther



I think there is such a thing as the Protestant imagination. When the Reformation became established, one of the things that was a question between Catholicism and the Reformation traditions was whether there was a hierarchy of being. If you look at Thomas Aquinas, for example, you have hierarchies of angels and all the rest of it, and hierarchies even of saints and then sub-saints. The

Reformation rejected all of that and created a new metaphysics that is not hierarchical. The Reformation rejected that model of reality and located everything normative that can be said about reality in human perception, there being, of course, no other avenue of knowing. So instead of having an externalized model of reality with an objective structure, we Protestants have a model of reality that is basically grounded in perception.

Marilynne Williamson, Interview with the PBS programme Religion and Ethics, 2005



In the biblical stories, grace and freedom are always encountered in a *sense-related way*. They are always expressed socially and historically. Grace and freedom are encountered in stories of awakening and exodus, of conversion and

liberation, of discipleship and of faces lifted up in hope. Grace is never just invisible, but always tangible. In all this, grace and freedom are being seen. Who sees his brother or sister, sees his God.

Johann Baptist Metz, The Emergent Church

BREAKING OPEN THE WORD

Jeremiah 31:27-34 (New International Version) Jenny Huckson

The new covenant foretold in Jeremiah 31 is the dawn that will pierce the gruelling night of a shattered people. As they face the destruction of their nation and the prospect of a long and bitter exile, God presents his people with assurance of restoration, lodging the seed of a glorious future hope in the cold, hard soil of Israel and Judah's winter. There are three basic elements to this new promised covenant

First, there will be a new ‘solidarity’: the separation occasioned by Israel and Judah’s sin will be overcome and YHWH will identify himself as their God and them as his people. By implication, the division within the kingdom itself will end and Israel and Judah will once again be united as a single people (cf. Ezekiel 37:15-28). Second, there will be a new ‘knowledge’ of YHWH. This is a reference both to the people’s knowledge of the saving tradition within which YHWH revealed himself (cf. 2:6-8) and to obedience to his ‘commands for justice’ (cf. 22:15-17). Third, the new relation will no longer be characterized by intermediation and the distance that maintained between YHWH and the majority of the people. Middle men with privileged access and knowledge, brokering relations between God and his people, will no longer be necessary. Rather, from the poorest to the richest, the youngest to the oldest, all will enjoy access to God and be acquainted with his truth. ‘All know the story, all accept the sovereignty, and all embrace the commands.’

Embedded within this prophecy is a rich vision of a sort of a utopian democratized politics, a polity where political authority is the possession of all, where each person is the trusted bearer of the national identity, where our past is restored to us and we are furnished with a future,

²⁷ “The days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will plant the kingdoms of Israel and Judah with the offspring of people and of animals. ²⁸ Just as I watched over them to uproot and tear down, and to overthrow, destroy and bring disaster, so I will watch over them to build and to plant,” declares the LORD. ²⁹ “In those days people will no longer say,

‘The parents have eaten sour grapes,
and the children’s teeth are set on edge.’

³⁰ Instead, everyone will die for their own sin; whoever eats sour grapes—their own teeth will be set on edge.

³¹ “The days are coming,” declares the LORD,
“when I will make a new covenant
with the people of Israel
and with the people of Judah.

³² It will not be like the covenant
I made with their ancestors
when I took them by the hand
to lead them out of Egypt,
because they broke my covenant,

though I was a husband to^[a] them,^[b]
declares the LORD.

³³ “This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel
after that time,” declares the LORD.

“I will put my law in their minds
and write it on their hearts.

I will be their God,
and they will be my people.

³⁴ No longer will they teach their neighbour,
or say to one another, ‘Know the LORD,’
because they will all know me,
from the least of them to the greatest,”
declares the LORD.

“For I will forgive their wickedness
and will remember their sins no more.”

Psalm 46 (“God Is with Us”) Good News Version Jenny Huckson

This psalm is a regular part of Jewish, Catholic, Anglican and Protestant liturgies. It is also known as "Luther's Psalm", as Martin Luther wrote his popular hymn "Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott" ("A Mighty Fortress Is Our God") as a paraphrase of Psalm 46. Luther's hymn has been quoted in many musical works, both religious and secular, including Bach's cantata *Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott*. The responses correspond to the last line of each verse and then after the 3rd verse the words “God is our shelter and strength”.

46 God is our shelter and strength,
always ready to help in times of trouble.

² So we will not be afraid, even if the earth is shaken
and mountains fall into the ocean depths;

³ even if the seas roar and rage,
and the hills are shaken by the violence.

God is our shelter and strength

⁴ There is a river that brings joy to the city of God,
to the sacred house of the Most High.

⁵ God is in that city, and it will never be destroyed;
at early dawn he will come to its aid.

⁶ Nations are terrified, kingdoms are shaken;
God thunders, and the earth dissolves.

God is our shelter and strength

⁷ The LORD Almighty is with us;

the God of Jacob is our refuge.

⁸ Come and see what the LORD has done.

See what amazing things he has done on earth.

⁹ He stops wars all over the world;

he breaks bows, destroys spears,
and sets shields on fire.

God is our shelter and strength

¹⁰ “Stop fighting,” he says, “and know that I am God,

supreme among the nations,

supreme over the world.”

¹¹ The LORD Almighty is with us;

the God of Jacob is our refuge.

God is our shelter and strength

Romans 3:19-28 (J. B. Phillips New Testament)

This is the classic Protestant reading, from Romans, the book that changed Martin Luther’s life, not to mention that of millions of others. In essence, the meaning of it is this: we can abandon special claims based on our achievements (either the principle of achievements or perhaps achievements focused on the law and culture; 3:27). God's goodness alone is our hope (3:28). Jew and Gentile are on a level playing field (3:29-30) as are all cultures and races, and God's generosity is unlimited towards all.

3 ¹⁹⁻²⁰ We know what the message of the Law is, to those who live under it—that every excuse may die on the lips of him who makes it and no living man may think himself beyond the judgment of God. No man can justify himself before God by a perfect performance of the Law’s demands—indeed it is the straight-edge of the Law that shows us how crooked we are.

God’s new plan—righteousness by faith, not through the Law

²¹⁻²⁶ But now we are seeing the righteousness of God declared quite apart from the Law (though amply testified to by both Law and Prophets)—it is a righteousness imparted to, and operating in, all who have faith in Jesus Christ. (For there is no distinction to be made

anywhere: everyone has sinned, everyone falls short of the beauty of God's plan.) Under this divine system a man who has faith is now freely acquitted in the eyes of God by his generous dealing in the redemptive act of Jesus Christ. God has appointed him as the means of propitiation, a propitiation accomplished by the shedding of his blood, to be received and made effective in ourselves by faith. God has done this to demonstrate his righteousness both by the wiping out of the sins of the past (the time when he withheld his hand), and by showing in the present time that he is a just God and that he justifies every man who has faith in Jesus Christ.

Faith, not pride of achievement

²⁷⁻²⁸ What happens now to human pride of achievement? There is no more room for it. Why, because failure to keep the Law has killed it? Not at all, but because the whole matter is now on a different plane—believing instead of achieving. We see now that a man is justified before God by the fact of his faith in God's appointed Saviour and not by what he has managed to achieve under the Law.

²⁹⁻³⁰ And God is God of both Jews and Gentiles, let us be quite clear about that! The same God is ready to justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised by faith also.

³¹ Are we then undermining the Law by this insistence on faith? Not a bit of it! We put the Law in its proper place.

The word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

For Meditation: In Christ Alone

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RY4CW5pte98>

John 8:31-38 (J.B. Phillips New Testament)

John Huckson

John's Gospel is later than the other three and is quite different in its presentation. In Mark, Matthew and Luke, Jesus' significance is summed up in that to which he points, directs his energy...putting into practice the Kingdom through his liberating action and insights. In John the focus subtly shifts from the Kingdom to Jesus himself: the point is belief and life in Jesus. In the gospel, we also detect a sense of real tension between the orthodox Jewish community of the synagogues and the infant Christian church made up of a range of people, including Jewish converts. It is the struggle between Jesus confessing Jewish Christians, who have left the synagogue and those who remain within it, that

sets the tone for much of John's theology and of our reading below. In our reading we find the Jews locating their identity in the Exodus – we are no longer slaves – whereas the Christian community is saying that only Jesus liberates.

³¹⁻³² So Jesus said to the Jews who believed in him, “If you are faithful to what I have said, you are truly my disciples. And you will know the truth and the truth will set you free!”

³³ “But we are descendants of Abraham,” they replied, “and we have never in our lives been any man's slaves. How can you say to us, ‘You will be set free’?”

³⁴⁻³⁸ Jesus returned, “Believe me when I tell you that every man who commits sin is a slave. For a slave is no permanent part of a household, but a son is. If the Son, then, sets you free, you are really free! I know that you are descended from Abraham, but some of you are looking for a way to kill me because you can't bear my words. I am telling you what I have seen in the presence of my Father, and you are doing what you have seen in the presence of your father.”

The Gospel of the Lord

Praise to you Lord Christ

Hymn: The Lord is my shepherd (TiS 659, My Shepherd, B. Boniwell, based on Psalm 23)

Some Thoughts about Grace and Freedom

Offering

Doxology

***Praise God, from whom all blessings flow,
praise him, all creatures here below,
praise him above, ye heavenly host,
praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.***

Prayer of Dedication

Prayers of the People

Ross Lorenz

The one who prays ends each petition with the words, “*in receiving your grace*”, and the congregational response, “*may we be vehicles of grace*”.

Lord's Prayer

Let us say the Lord's Prayer

***Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.***

***Forgive us our sins,
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.***

***For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours,
now and forever. Amen.***

하늘에 계신 우리 아버지여
이름이 거룩히 여김을 받으시오며
나라이 임하옵시며
뜻이 하늘에서 이룬 것 같이
땅에서도 이루어지이다.
오늘날 우리에게 일용할 양식을 주옵시고
우리가 우리에게
죄 지은 자를 사하여 준 것 같이
우리 죄를 사하여 주옵시고
우리를 시험에 들게 하지 마옵시고
다만 악에서 구하옵소서
대개 나라와 권세와 영광이
아버지께 영원히 있사옵나이다. 아멘

Closing Hymn: Amazing Grace (TiS 129, Amazing Grace, John Newton)

Blessing and Sending Out

Christ is life!

Let us live
Following the God of grace and freedom,
with perception and discernment,
without fear, with imagination and courage

Our service has ended

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord

In the name of Christ

Going Out: Shalom to you now (TiS 778, Somos del Señor, Elise, Shoemaker Eslinger)

Musical Postlude

Organist:

Jim Abraham

