

Reformation Sunday
October 30, 2011

Relationships and Reformation

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2 Timothy 4:9-16

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Today we are celebrating the Lutheran Reformation of the church. Most of you know the story. Almost 500 years ago, a monk who studied God's Word recognized the church of his day had abandoned God's truth. The church had abandoned the basic teaching of the Christian faith: We are saved from our sins only by God's grace (not by our works.) We are saved only by faith... a simple trust in God's promises. And this saving truth is found in the only guiding standard: the Word of God.

When did the Reformation begin? We usually mark the beginning as October 31, 1517, the day Martin Luther nailed 95 theses or discussion points to the town bulletin board (the church door). He was objecting to church practices which were not in line with Scripture, and he simply wanted to have a Scriptural debate about these items. The church was not interested, and so a movement began.

But the truth is, God's Church is constantly under attack. There is constant pressure from the world, from Satan and from our own human pride to introduce new teachings, to drift from the truth, and to begin to put man at the center of religion instead of God. The temptation is to keep silent about the truth. For this reason, it can be said that the church is in continuous need of reformation. We need to be constantly on guard, constantly looking for the inevitable drifting from God's Word. History shows us that tolerance of change to God's Word is a slippery slope. It shows that when Christians decide to shut up instead of speak out, decline has begun. And so the Reformation of the church is really a continuing, ongoing thing as we fight against the continuous pulls away from the truth of God.

Now, I'll admit that the title today is somewhat of a strange one. I'm guessing you haven't heard a Reformation sermon on this ever. The topic today is "Relationships and Reformation." What I discovered from the word of God before us today is that Christian relationships are actually very important when it comes to keeping and sharing the truth of God. So anything that helps us keep and share the Word of God is necessarily directly connected to Reformation!

I'm sure you've noticed what I have noticed. In our world today, people are becoming increasingly isolated from one another and anti-social. Now you might push back, "No way! Facebook has more than a half-billion users. We e-mail and text one another all the time. How is that not social?!" Simply this: It's not face-to-face human contact. Whether you're a touchy-feely person or not, we thrive on human contact. And I literally mean contact. Hand-shakes, hugs, kisses, pats on the back, high-fives... even the end zone slap on the butt... all are evidence of our need for human contact. Studies show that orphans who are deprived of human contact suffer greatly developmentally. I had a professor in seminary that said when we make hospital calls, we should intentionally make sure our visit starts and ends with "skin on skin." Human touch to show compassion and empathy is vital.

The idea I want to convey today is that your personal, social, and even skin on skin interactions with your fellow believers are essential for the continuing reformation of the church. If

the church will keep and share the unchanging word of God, Christian relationships are absolutely vital! If our Christian relationships break down, if we do not fellowship, if we do not communicate, if we do not help each other and empathize with each other, if we do not encourage each other with the Word and build each other up... one of two things (or maybe both) will happen: 1) the gravitational field which is continuously pulling the church from the truth of God will overpower us and the church will gradually abandon the truth of God which saves us. Or 2) the church will fail to boldly proclaim the truth of God to a dying world.

On what basis do I make this claim? 2 Timothy 4:9-16. Paul's second letter to Timothy was the very last letter written by Paul. Not too long ago, we finished up a study of the book of Acts. We followed Paul through three missionary journeys. The book of Acts ends with Paul in prison in Rome. He is under house arrest, and is able to continue to teach and preach the Gospel of Jesus. Then the book ends. What happens to Paul? From details pulled from 1 – 2 Timothy and Titus, we know that Paul was eventually released from prison. Exactly what happens from there and when it happens, we're not sure. But evidence indicates that Paul revisited many of the former churches he had founded to strengthen them. And he also apparently fulfilled his dream of sharing the Gospel in Spain. Way on the western end of Europe, Paul had the opportunity to share Christ. Paul returned to the area of Macedonia, and at some point was arrested and imprisoned in Rome. Meanwhile, in 64AD, a huge fire burned most of Rome to the ground. What likely happened was that the half-crazy emperor, Nero, started the fire himself. But Nero successfully launched a smear campaign against the Christians to blame them. Christians were persecuted, arrested, beaten, and put to death. It was in this climate that Paul returned to the area and was arrested.

This imprisonment was nothing like the first. Paul was in a dungeon and in chains. He apparently had a first trial, and it did not go well at all. Paul senses that his days on earth are numbered. He expects that his imprisonment will end in his execution. And it did. We don't know how long after Paul wrote this letter... maybe a few months, maybe a little more than a year... but Paul was led out 3 miles outside of Rome and there he was a beheaded. The faithful apostle was finally allowed to depart and be with Christ, which was his heart's desire.

So this is the context of his second letter to a young pastor whom Paul brought to faith, and whom Paul considered a son: Timothy. I often like to assign a portion of Scripture to you to read during the week. You might have guessed I'm going to ask you to read 2 Timothy this week. Paul gives final encouragements to this young pastor, especially encouraging him to keep the true teaching of God and remain faithful to God. There is emotion and urgency that you don't see as much in Paul's other letters. So read 2 Timothy this week.

We're going to take a look at the end of the book at the personal remarks that come just before the final greetings. Listen to the impact that relationships have when it comes to the reformation of the church. And again, by reformation of the church we mean the continuous keeping and sharing of God's true Word.

Paul wrote the letter while he was in prison these personal remarks to Timothy:
2 Timothy 4:9-18 Do your best to come to me quickly, for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry. I sent Tychicus to Ephesus. When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, and my scrolls, especially the parchments. Alexander the metalworker did me a great deal of harm. The Lord will repay him for what he has done. You too should be

on your guard against him, because he strongly opposed our message. At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them. But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Do you see how during this critical time, as his life draws to a close, as the pressures and temptations are at a peak, Paul talks all about Christian relationships. Let's take a look at them quick.

Demas abandoned Paul and headed for Thessalonica. Some think he was from there and he went home. Paul was pained by this... not just for the personal suffering, but also because this believer was not faithful. He chose earthly pleasure and an easier earthly life in exchange for eternal heavenly glory. This broke Paul's heart, and left Paul alone.

Crescens went to Galatia. He was not abandoning not abandoning Paul. He left apparently in service to the church. Paul's not accusing, just explaining why he's alone.

Titus went to Dalmatia, again for apparently good reasons. Paul has no criticism for him. He's just mentioning why he his alone.

What is Paul explaining? He desperately *needs companionship*. He needs encouragement from fellow believers. He's alone and he's struggling. You can hear it in his voice.

Luke is still with him. This is Luke the physician, the one who wrote the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts. He was a frequent traveling companion of Paul. He was with Paul in his first imprisonment in Rome, and he is with him again here. What a comfort, encouragement and support this faithful follower of Christ was for Paul!

But Paul needed more the Luke. But Paul needed more help, so he directly asks Timothy to come to him quickly, and to bring **Mark** with him because Mark, "**is helpful to me in my ministry**". Now that's worth expanding on. This is the Mark who abandoned Paul and Barnabas in his first mission journey. Because of this, when it was time to start the 2nd journey, Paul refused to take Mark. Barnabas insisted they must (he was a cousin of Barnabas.) The two couldn't come to an agreement, and they parted ways, each continuing to serve the church, but not together.

Well, apparently there was reconciliation at some point, for now Paul values Mark and needs him at his side to continue his ministry. This is the same mark who was a traveling companion with Peter. It's the same one who wrote the Gospel of Mark. Isn't it interesting that Paul has one of the Gospel writers with him (Luke) and wants a second one to come as quickly as possible?

One more Christian man is mentioned: **Tychicus**. Paul sent him to Ephesus. Many think that's where Timothy way, and they Tychicus was delivering the letter, and filling in for Timothy so he could come visit Paul.

One more person is mentioned: **Alexander the metal worker** who did a great deal of harm. We don't know much about him, but context seems to indicate he was someone in Rome who opposed Paul, probably witnessing against Paul in the first trial. When Timothy came, he was to keep his eyes out for that guy. He was bad news.

Paul encourages Timothy to come quickly. Once winter hit, transportation would be much more difficult and Paul couldn't wait. The travel was also urgent because he didn't know how long he had. Also he urgently needed what Timothy would bring: two things: a cloak that he left with a man named Carpus at Troas. This was something like a poncho... an outer garment that would keep

him warm and dry. Winter was approaching. And he needed his scrolls, especially the parchments. We're not told what was written on them, but what scrolls would he have but the Word of God?

As his life drew closer to the end, Paul needed three things. Warmth, Scriptures, and Christian companionship.

Isn't Paul focus on relationships interesting at this critical time? Let's summarize the nature of these various relationships and recognize these types of Christian relationships in our lives today:

- Some leave because of unfaithfulness to Christ and even leave the faith. These are perhaps the most difficult and discouraging relationships.
- Some leave because of circumstances. In your life, maybe a Christian friend gets an out of state job and leaves you, but not the faith.
- Some are unfaithful or abandon you when the going gets rough out of fear. (Think of Mark.)
- Of them, some return and there is forgiveness and reconciliation. Never judge someone or count them out if they let you down. We have failures. We grow and mature. A Christian who lets you down today, may be a faithful, needed friend in the future.
- And some Christian friends are there through thick and thin.

What do we see from all of this? Relationships are messy. They cause pain. Some conclude: It's better to be alone! But here's the truth God teaches us through Paul:

We *need* each other. God has put us together in the body of Christ. As different as we all are, we have one Lord, one faith, on baptism. We all will join together as one at the feet of the Jesus in heaven and praise him together eternally!

Where you have failed a Christian friend, ask forgiveness from God and that person. Know that you are forgiven!

When someone fails you, forgive as Christ forgave, and make every effort to restore them to Christ, and your relationship too. They may become a valued friend.

When someone fails you and they leave Christ, remember that you have a God who is your eternal constant. Who will never leave you or forsake you.

And isn't the most vital relationship? The one with your Lord? You have a Savior who is your friend always. He won't ever abandon you because he is your brother who lived and died for you and now lives forever. Whatever happens in your Christian relationships, remember they are all built on and derived from the Lord Jesus Christ who never changes and is always there as your Savior and friend. And this is what makes Christian relationships so valuable... and so different from friendships with non-Christians. Our Christian friends strengthen our connection to Christ. They encourage us in our faith, correct us when we stray, and walk with us in our walk with God.

Relationships and reformation. As we work *together* (not apart, not individually, but *together*) for the truth of God, encouraging each other with the truth of God, holding each other accountable with the truth of God, the church remains in a state of reformation. Together, we keep and share the truth of God. Let's work at and foster and grow our Christian relationships for the sake of God's truth! Amen.