

Focus for Today: **REFORMATION IS PRESENT**

1. REFORMATION IS PRESENT IN THE CHURCH

MEDITATION: **Joel 2:12–17**

The book of the prophet Joel is packed with reformation. (cf. **2:12,13**). Reformation shows itself thousands of years ago in the midst of the assembly of Israel. “Rend your hearts,” Joel says to then people, “and not your garments.” The tearing of one’s clothes in Joel’s day was meant to be a show of repentance, an outward act that demonstrates one’s sorrow and contrition – something that would be meaningless without the heart involved. Reformation is present in the church.

Israel is not unlike the church in the days of the protestant reformation or today for that matter. In the 16th century, it was not the tearing of one’s garments that was meant to show repentance, rather other so called “satisfactions” were required. The confession of one’s sins was not enough to be assured of your forgiveness. Added to the confession, was the expectation that you do some work to prove your sincerity. The priest would hear your confession, and prescribe some “satisfaction” so that you could prove your repentance and then you can be assured that you have forgiveness.

Just as with Israel, this tended to lead the people and the religious leaders to externalize repentance. No longer was repentance a matter of the one tearing the heart to pieces over the ways we’ve sinned against God. No longer was repentance a matter of our heart being stricken with guilt for the fact that we’ve willingly lashed against the God who bought us back from our slavery to sin. No longer was repentance understood in its basic sense: “a turning from sin toward God.” Repentance had become a matter of mechanics. If you can find a way to satisfy the priest by making up for what you’ve done wrong, then you don’t need to be afraid of punishment. This adding of external works to what should be a matter of the heart was taking the Church’s focus off of Christ – and putting in on yourself. Both in Joel’s day looking ahead to this coming Savior, and in Luther’s day and our day, looking back to what this Savior has done for us, our hearts need to focus on Christ.

2:15,16 Israel, like the church today is an outward, visible assembly. We call them the Israelites or the Hebrews. In Luther’s day, we see an outward assembly; we call it the Roman Catholic Church. Today, we see an outward assembly of people. We call it Christianity. God cries out, (**v.15**). God calls everyone. “Gather the people... the elders ... the children, ...” Sin is evident in everyone’s life and is present in everyone’s hearts. This is why God calls all people to gather in Zion. Zion in the OT was a picture of the Church – the place where God dwells, the place where God is known and heard, the place where the good news of salvation is proclaimed. This is where the troubled soul finds rest and reformation.

The protestant reformers blew the trumpet in Zion. They recognized that, as **v.17** says, people were wondering, “where is their God?” There was no difference real in what the religions of the world presented and what Christianity presented. With clear confessional writings, they made known what had been hidden: the truth of the gospel – it is not a matter of outward works that assures us of forgiveness, it is a matter of God telling us in the Word ; it is a matter of God showing us what the death of Christ means; it is a matter of Christ’s righteousness given to us through faith that assures us of forgiveness. The reformers were willing to give up their own lives in order to be sure this gospel truth was passed on to future generations. And we are ready to do the same. Reformation is present in the Church.

2. REFORMATION IS PRESENT IN THE HOME

MEDITATION: **Deuteronomy 6:4–9 (NKJV)**

Does anyone know what the word “Catechism” means? It means “instruction.” It comes from the Greek word Luke uses in chapter one when he says to his reader, “that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed (catechized)” (**Luke 1:4**). Does anyone know the original purpose of Martin Luther’s writing of the Small Catechism?

I had one person one challenge my beliefs by saying, “Why do you need someone to tell you what the Bible means?” Why do you have Sermons? Shouldn’t the Bible be enough? Shouldn’t you just have the pastor stand up their and read the Bible instead of giving his own take on it?” With the Catechism then for instance, why do we have one book meant to explain another book?

Reformation is present in the home. **Verse 7** says, “You shall teach these words diligently.” The concept comes from a word meaning, “to sharpen a sword.” These words that Moses writes the Israelites were to use so as to sharpen their understanding and faith. He goes on, “you shall talk of them,” you shall speak about them, you shall dwell on them. These words of the Bible recorded by inspiration are to more than something we repeat every week in church; and more than something we only recite in Catechism Class. They are to be the source of conversation in our lives. These words are to be etched in our hearts as v.6 says. When we sit down, when we stand up, when we walk, when we go to work, when we come home, when we’re with our Christian friends, when we’re with our nonChristian friends – these words that God has given to us are to be the source of all we do and say.

God says, talk about them. Teach them. This is why we have sermons. This is why we have catechism class. We are here to battle Satan and all the tricks and errors he throws at us. We unite against him with a common confession of faith and teaching. We continue to take God’s Word and apply it to our everyday situations. It is a great source of comfort to read His Word and talk about what meaning it has for our faith and life. It is a source of instruction for us, not just in church on Sunday then, but everyday.

Originally, the Small Catechism was written for use in the home. It was given to Christian parents in the hopes that they would review these teachings day by day. In Luther's day there were many priest who were not serving the people with the nourishment of God's Word that they needed. The catechism was a way to bring that needed instruction into the home and into the hands of parents. It brought a regular exercise of faith into the homes of Christians.

Imagine that Ascension Lutheran Church was no more. Imagine that you were isolated from any like minded Christians. What would you do? **v.7** – The call to Christian education does not begin with a pastor. It begins with the parents. The pastor and Sunday School is only supplemental and is minor in comparison to the impact we as parents have on our children. So if the day should ever come where this pastor or this church was not teaching the truth of God's word, it would be up to you as individuals to carry on the truth to the next generation. This is how the CLC was founded after all. Like minded Christians concerned for one thing: passing on the truth of the gospel to the next generation. I read from an excerpt written by a pastor to his congregation when they were facing the decision of whether to break fellowship with Wisconsin and Missouri Synod in the 1950's:

The teaching of our children is a continuing, daily process. Even now as we prepare to make this decision they are being shaped for the future. They are watching us in the matter before us. Either we will demonstrate to them that the Word of God is to be valued above all else, or that full obedience to the Word of God is not always necessary, or that we are unconcerned about the outcome of this matter. In my judgment the last impression is the worst; for to be indifferent is to leave the impression that the Word of God is not important enough for us to be concerned about it. Let us not underestimate the lasting impress that the decision we face will have upon our children and thus upon the future of the saving truth among us.

v.3 – Reformation is present in the home.

3. REFORMATION IS PRESENT IN THE HEART

MEDITATION: Isaiah 29:13–14,17–19 (NKJV)

As we commented before, at the time of the Reformation there was a prevailing emphasis on external works and a loss of understanding of what repentance and faith are all about. Hence in Martin Luther's 95 Theses, the very first thesis reads, *1. Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, when He said "Repent" willed that the whole life of believers should be repentance.*

The teaching he is challenging is the idea that a person has to do certain works defined by the church in order to prove his repentance and fully be assured of forgiveness. The question is posed, "what role do good works play in our repentance and forgiveness of sins?" Is it necessary to right the wrong in order to be assured of forgiveness?

We find that this false teaching which they called, “satisfactions” snowballed to the point where people thought that if they would buy a piece of paper from the pope or make a pilgrimage to Rome, they would receive extra forgiveness, extra merits of Christ and the saints, even to the point of freeing a dead relative from suffering in purgatory. Soon we find virtually no talk of repentance of the heart due to a focus on the external ceremonies, the pilgrimages, the relics, and the money. The gospel was changed from a free work of God giving you forgiveness, to a merited work of man to earn for yourself forgiveness.

29:13 — It is actually not that hard for our flesh to let us pretend to be a Christian. If faith were a matter of making a trip to Rome each year, or pass along a certain amount of our income each Sunday or promising to be in church every service, I think we could make ourselves look pretty good. Faith is a work of God in our hearts. This is what the young monk meant when he wrote, in Thesis 3 -- *there is no inward repentance which does not outwardly work divers mortifications of the flesh*. The role then that good works play is only that they are a result of repentance and faith. They are not necessary for forgiveness. They flow from forgiveness. The inward produces the outward.

And how is it that God gets at the inward? How is it that Reformation is present in the heart? God visits us with power through His word. **v.13b**. True fear, – which in the OT is often equivalent with how we talk about “faith,” – true fear does not come by the commandment of men. Faith does not come by living up to what your pastor tells you you must do. It does not come by the CLC defining what is right and wrong. Faith comes only by God working through the hearing of His word and through the truth of the gospel. This is what verse 14 calls “a marvelous work.” It will not be by the wisdom of man that the path to heaven is understood, nor will it be by the commandments of men. Rather it is by that which man considers foolishness: God has forgiven your sins by the innocent life and death of His beloved Son Jesus Christ. This is what opens the ears of the deaf and the eyes of the blind.

v.17. – Dry, withered, dead hearts are changed into fruit producing soil of the Spirit. And **v.19** – The poor among men rejoice because the Holy One of Israel has made them rich. What soul could be find assurance in a forgiveness that relies on him doing something and being perfect in his sincerity? Every work we do, though it may have the outward appearance of righteousness is still ever tainted by our thoughts and weaknesses. That is why we need a forgiveness that comes to the poor, the weak, the humble, and the foolish – not through the law of outward works, but through the grace of God which touches the heart. **Romans 3:21–23 (NKJV) — 21 But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, 22 even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.**

This is the foundation of true repentance, not by works, but by grace. This is the foundation on which reformers stand. Beginning with men like John Huss, who was willing to be burned at the stake rather than forsake the truth of the gospel, and carried on with you. As Martin Luther wrote, “tho’ devils all the world should fill, All eager to devour us, We tremble not , we fear no ill, They shall not overpower us. ... The Word they still shall let remain nor any thanks have for it; He’s by our side upon the plain with His good gifts and Spirit.” Reformation is present in the Church, in the home, and most of all in the gospel touched heart. Amen.