**Luke 7:31-35** November 4, 2018

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** Reformation Sunday

*Luke 7:31“To what, then, can I compare the people of this generation? What are they like? 32They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling out to each other: ‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not cry.’ 33For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, ‘He has a demon.’ 34The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, ‘Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and “sinners.” ’ 35But wisdom is proved right by all her children.”*

Dear Friends in Christ,

The American Revolution, the Russian Revolution, the Industrial Revolution, the Information Revolution. Revolution tells us that something big changed. America went from being a colony, to being an independent nation. In an even greater revolution (but not necessarily better) Russia went from monarchy to communism. The Industrial Revolution turned the bulk of humanity from farmers to city dwellers. The Information Revolution has exponentially expanded the amount of information we can access. Revolutions are BIG changes—all the rules, all the outcomes, everything.

This year we celebrate the 501st anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation. Nails pounded into a door. “Here I stand! I cannot do otherwise, God help me!” Add to that Martin Luther’s colorful language and willingness call a spade a dirty, nasty, rusty spade and you might be forgiven for thinking the Lutheran Reformation was really the Lutheran Revolution. But we have never called it that. It has always been called a reformation.

Revolution looks at the past, applies gasoline and a blow torch and says, “Let’s start something new!” Reformation looks at the past and says, “We have wandered. Let’s get back to where we are supposed to be.”

Five hundred years after Luther, we perhaps forget that Martin Luther looked at the events of 1517 and following as reformation. He longed for reformation. He didn’t want to break from the church of his day. He was Catholic. Had been born, bred and educated Catholic. But through his many religious struggles and his studying for university religious lectures, he began to see that the faith he had been raised in had left the course of faith the Bible had plotted out. Martin Luther and company did not long to chart a brand new trajectory (that’s revolution), but he longed to return to the trajectory that the Bible had plotted out long ago (that’s reformation). And he hoped that the people, the beloved Christians around him, would listen, understand and also reform – even as he on a personal level had had to do.

**Reformation – It’s a Matter of Attitude**

In our reading, we stand perhaps half-way through the ministry of Jesus. At just this point, it is also the end of John the Baptist’s ministry. These two were a dynamic duo. Like all dynamic duos, one was clearly the side-kick and the other the authority; one the Savior, the other his messenger. Which is as it should be. But unlike most sidekicks, John the Baptist wasn’t there for comedy relief, he had a vital and unique message. Even though he would be ushering in the never-before-seen Savior of humanity, the Son of God, he had a message of not revolution but reform.

Remember that? Before John was born, God told his parents that their child would be a special child in God’s plan. This is what God said John would do: *“Many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the Lord their God.”* (Luke 1:16). His job was to bring people back. That’s reformation, not revolution. It was a message to God’s people to come back—to use the picture on the front of the bulletin—to get the vehicle back between the lines, back to the true faith.

Jesus, while he was much more than a reformer, was also a reformer of the Old Testament faith. Sometimes we think of Jesus as a complete revolution. For those who took God’s Old Testament revelation seriously and studiously, Jesus was not. That’s why two aged believers, Simeon and Anna, who knew only Genesis to Malachi looked at the infant Jesus and praised him, not as a revolutionary who tossed aside the Old Testament, but as the fulfillment of what God had been saying all along. Jesus himself proved the validity of the ancient Jewish faith by frequently quoting it. He said he had come to fulfill it, not to abolish it.

Both John and Jesus appealed to their 1st century Jewish audience on the basis of what their audience already knew and believed about God’s plan of salvation.

It started easy. Christmas night went pretty well with the shepherds joyfully following the angels’ directions to the Bethlehem manger. And the Magi diligently followed the star that God put in front of them. But it wasn’t always like that. In fact, it was almost never like that.

Sure, there were times when both John and Jesus were tremendously popular. But just like in the 21st century, people of the 1st century had short attention spans. Today’s religious fad is tomorrow’s ugly sweater. John and Jesus had their days of popularity, but when it came down to it, most of the people who came also left.

At this point Jesus cried out, [here I read our text,] ***“To what, then, can I compare the people of this generation? What are they like? They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling out to each other: ‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not cry.’ ”***

What is that about children in the marketplace? Remember Cops and Robbers? I don’t know how it was around you, but around us kids always wanted to be the robber. The robber gets to hide, to run. As the robber you do what you want to do. The cop is stuck with chasing you. So after being the cop for a while one kid says, “My turn to be the robber.” Then the kids who were robbers say, “I’m done. I’m tired. I gotta go. See ya later.” When someone else gets to have fun they quit. That was the same behavior Jesus identifies with children calling out, ***“We played the flute for you, and you did not dance.”*** “Play the game *our way*!”

This is human nature, not just in playground games, but also in the important stuff. People are basically selfish, petulant children who want their way, and if they don’t get it will take their toys and go home. Whether 1st century Jews or 21st century Americans, it is human nature.

We “prefer a religion that accepts [us] just as [we] are without any change in [our] nature and way of thinking.” (Wenzel, 302) Just as always, people don’t want God to challenge them. They don’t want God to tell them that some of their choices in life are wrong, are sin. Jesus saw it clearly in his day. And it is worth noting that the supremely approachable, loving, Jesus couldn’t quite pull off being acceptable to all the people who came to him. More than one walked away disappointed. More than one said that their first visit with Jesus was not personally validating and empowering. More than one felt that Jesus was a little too sure of what he felt and believed. You know what? Jesus never apologized to anyone who walked away. As a wise person has told me more than once, if Jesus couldn’t do it, don’t be surprised if not everyone accepts your invitation to Christmas Eve, or appreciates how sure you are of God’s word.

But I have gotten a bit off track because reformation isn’t about the outside world, it is about you and me, people inside God’s church. Jesus tells us these things so that *we* learn the proper attitude of reformation.

Our liturgy, the order of worship we use every Sunday, is designed to instill in us the continual attitude of reform. When I say that, don’t think that our liturgy is a recent or Lutheran invention. Our liturgy follows the same outline that our forefathers in faith used in worship. By this I don’t mean in the time of the Civil War, or the Mayflower, or the Lutheran Reformation. Keep walking backwards in time with me. Before the Black Death swept Europe, before William the Conqueror landed on England’s shores, before Mohammed spawned the false religion called Islam, while Roman emperors still ruled, confession of sins was part of the Christian worship service. From the dawning centuries of the Christian faith, perhaps even the dawning decades, Christians knew that reformation is something that must go on inside of us, individually, weekly.

***“John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, ‘He has a demon.’ The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, ‘Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and “sinners.” ’ But wisdom is proved right by all her children.”*** As long as we will live in this world, our sinful flesh wants a religion that is free and painless – two of our favorite words, right? Free and pain free. Our sinful flesh wants a religion that allows us to do what we want to do. Confession of sins is an assault on our lazy, selfish sinful nature. It admits that we do what we should not. That we always try to bend things, even God’s Word, to our benefit. That we fail to fulfill our obligations. All because we want free and painless religion.

Confession is the weekly, (one Christian woman I know prays the confession of sins every morning!) confession is the weekly or daily reminder that I need to be continually reforming my sinful ways and conforming my will to God’s. And even if I have managed to overcome the greatest and most outward sins, in confession I find that my sinful flesh is still finding new ways to sin. If sin can’t enter through an open doorway, it climbs in through a window. Sin always finds a way into my life! It is so frustrating!

But here is where our custom of confession is so valuable. For not only are we brought to see how far short of God’s ideal we are, but in every confession of sins there is also absolution, the announcing of the forgiveness of sins. It is a reminder that though we frequently fail our heavenly Father, yet for the sake of Jesus Christ, his Son, we are still called children of our heavenly Father. Forgiveness was not free or painless. But it was paid for and suffered for by another. When we see that, how can we not desire to reform ourselves in thankful appreciation.

As so while Jesus states the opposite of the attitude of Reformation in his parable of children in a marketplace, he teaches elsewhere what the proper attitude is.

At another time, in a dispute about a seemingly minor point, Jesus himself said, *“The Scripture cannot be broken”* (John 10:35). God didn’t make mistakes in his word. Which is something we must remember when we get to those teachings of the Bible that we have difficulty with. Stop being a child in the marketplace telling God, “If you don’t dance to my tune, I’m outta here.” Jesus said, *“The Scripture cannot be broken.”* A reformation spirit conforms to that.

Remember Jesus’ word, *“He who belongs to God hears what God says.”* It reminds me of a dog we once had. All dogs lick and clean their feet, but we had a dog that was obsessed. I don’t know what he thought he had, but sometimes he would chew at his feet until he had open festering sores and he would limp around the yard like he broke a leg. Are we ever like that with one or the other teaching of God. Our human mind trips over a teaching, and then it gets annoyed and keeps nibbling at it, till we have ourselves worked nearly into unbelief.

Humble yourself. Stop picking at it. Exhibit the humble heart of faith which says, “I don’t really understand this, but God said it. And so I accept it, and pray that God will make this clear to me one day, and if not before, when I enter his presence through the merits of Jesus Christ.”

That is the Attitude of Reformation: a heart and mind that listen and reform themselves and then conform to the word and will of God. Amen.