

Reformation Sunday, 1st Sunday in End Times – Year C – October 31, 2010

Based on Romans 3:19-28 written by Pastor Paul Horn

“What if our fathers had not taken their stand?”

Ever wonder what would have become of us, if our forefathers had not taken their stand? What would have become of the United States of America, for instance, if the 56 signers of the Declaration of Independence hadn't taken their stand and at such a great cost? What was that cost you ask? How about this: Of the 56 men who signed the Declaration of Independence, 5 were tortured to death, 12 had their homes burned to the ground, 2 had sons that were killed and 2 more kidnapped. About half of the 56 men, in other words, signed their possessions away and signed over human blood when they signed that document. That's how important their liberties were to them. And if they hadn't taken their stand, where we would be today?

How about 100 years later? What if Abraham Lincoln would not have declared war on the South and on slavery - losing his own life to the cause and risking the life of the union itself? Or Martin Luther King Jr. some 100 years after Lincoln? What if he hadn't had his “dream” and what if he weren't willing to die to see equal rights granted for people of every race in this nation? Again, where would we be if our forefathers had not taken their stand?

What's true of American history is also true of our spiritual history. Could you imagine if the apostles and prophets had not been stoned to death, sawed in two, and crucified for the Truth of the Scriptures as we have been given today?

What if God had not emboldened Martin Luther to take his stand on October 31, 1517, forfeiting his very life for the cause of the eternal Gospel? Unless God would have provided someone else, you and I would have nothing. Neither would your children. We would have been doomed to eternal death in hell forever. And not because God hadn't provided salvation in Christ, but because mankind had simply grown tired of hearing it. That was the power of the antichrist some 500 years ago. Thank your God on this Reformation Sunday that he has raised up fathers for us who took their stand in history and, even more, who took their stand spiritually!

What if Martin Luther had said, “Let someone else do it. Even though they are leading the world into eternal perdition, the power and influence of the papacy is much too strong to stand up to and proclaim the truth.” Let me ask you another question: Fathers and mothers of future generations who are already among us here today! What if you don't take your stand for them? “What stand,” you ask? What issues are we facing anymore? What issues are there as extreme as our forefathers once faced? They are too numerous to count, but here seem to be a couple of the more pressing:

How many of us will take a stand against postmodernism? “What's that,” you say? If we don't know the term, we certainly have run up against this worldview in society. Postmodernism the belief – conscious or not – that there is no absolute single truth. It's the idea that truth is relative to the individual or group and “tolerance” is now a key word. The only thing that is wrong according to this view is to say that something is wrong at all. It's seen today in the decline of morality, the acceptance of homosexuality and unmarried folks cohabitating. Postmodernism is a worldview that is even embraced by churches. Such church bodies say they are a “Bible Believing” church but deny that the Bible itself is inspired by God, reliable, or even understandable. Postmodernism proclaimed by Christians who are quick to say “Judge ye not!” and who never quote “Repent and believe!” Postmodernism allows Oprah to preach from the pulpit that there are many paths to heaven, but woe to the pastor who preaches from his pulpit that there is only one way through Jesus Christ.

Fellow reformers, are you waging war against this deceptive philosophy? Have you seen it strive to grab hold of your children, friends, and family in society? What will happen if we don't take our stand? What will

happen to our children and the generations to come? What will happen if we go the way of the ELCA's leadership or other liberal church bodies? Those who wear the name but whom Luther himself would be ashamed of? Yes, we have to name names these days, especially against the leaders who parade their sin publicly and lead God's people astray. It's very anti-postmodern, granted. But so is the Truth!

How many of us will take a stand against Islam? That's not politically correct either, is it? Now, I don't want to come off as arrogant. Our purpose is not to be divisive. Our goal, as Scripture directs us, is to simply state the truth and do so in love. It's not that we do not love the people within Islam or the ELCA or Catholics or any other religion. We do. We must. Christ's love compels us to see all people as sinners whom he sought to redeem. We are all alike, no matter what our creed. We are all desperate for God to save us by grace. This is what the Reformation was all about. So the issue we have with Islam is not with the people but with their teaching and their false god, Allah. And the road that is paved within that religion is not one that leads to heaven. Paul said, **"See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ"** (Colossians 2:9).

What if Christ had said, "Let someone else take their stand against Satan and the sinful world. Let someone else suffer and die and defeat death. That's too great a cost." Then we would have no hope, we would be lost in our sins, waiting and wondering, "Who will step up for us? Who will set us free from our sins?"

Not me, not you. For as the Apostle Paul says in our lesson this morning, **"No one will be declared righteous in God's sight by observing the law."** That's a slap in the face to postmodern thinking and Islam and Catholicism and every other religion that teaches that good works are necessary for salvation. Because most people say, "I'm a good person, better than most. Surely God cannot condemn me for slipping up a few times? Surely he cannot damn me to hell for my sins, which are not as great as some other's sins. That's too narrow minded. That puts God in a box!"

Here in the courtroom of God any mouth that pleads in defense of humankind is stopped. **God's law makes us conscious of sin.** It points out that I have sinned, that I have fallen short; that all have sinned, all have fallen short of the obedience to God's commandments that he demands. All must stand before God on their own and each one will be held accountable for their sins of thought, word, deed and desire. No amount of good works or striving can earn salvation. We all stand before the Judge's bench. There is our list of sins, which Satan clutches in his hands. He emphatically points out our failures, especially for failing to stand up for the truth of God's Word. And points his finger at you and says, "You have sinned. You must be punished as the law of God declares." Heart pounding, palms sweating, knees knocking, what will judge say?

Here in God's Word, preserved for us today, he allows us to step into his courtroom and hear his verdict. Listen to what God has done for you in Romans 3.

vs28 For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from observing the law. We are convinced, that through Christ Jesus, God provided justification: that because of Christ's life, God's demand for perfect obedience is satisfied; because of his death, Jesus took God's wrath and atoned for the sins of the world. So God justified all people; he declared them not guilty of their sins because of Christ Jesus.

Lest we doubt and wonder, "Does God make this declaration even of me? Even though I have not always taken my stand in defense of the Scriptures? Even though I am included in 'all have sinned?'" Paul reassures us that even though all have sinned, even though all have fallen short, **"all are justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus."** As we stand before the judge's bench, he has to throw the evidence of our sins out, and points us to the cross and says, "Listen to my Son! He cries out, 'It is

finished!' The perfect life is complete, the perfect sacrifice is made. What you cannot do, Christ did for you! You are not guilty!"

President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863. The proclamation declared "that all persons held as slaves" within the rebellious states "are, and henceforward shall be free." Despite this expansive wording, the Emancipation Proclamation was limited. It applied only to states that had seceded from the Union, leaving slavery untouched in the loyal border states. It also expressly exempted parts of the Confederacy that had already come under Northern control. Most important, the freedom it promised depended upon Union military victory.

Unlike the emancipation proclamation, your justification is complete. **Vs28 For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from observing the law.** Justified by Christ's victory alone, by faith alone... Neither your good works nor your faith begin your justification, neither do they complete it. As Jesus said, "It is finished." This proclamation is received complete through faith. And in regards to your faith... the Holy Spirit begins and completes faith by working through the Means of Grace – the gospel in Word and Sacrament. Justification through faith, a gift given to me, to you, to set you free. You are free from your sins, you are free from Satan's accusations, your guilty conscience is set free, the chains of hell and your grave have been shattered, you have been freed to life in heaven for all eternity. Free at last! Free at last!

The foundation of our church, your faith, the salvation of all people, depends on this one doctrine: justification. What if Luther had not challenged the leaders of the Catholic Church to debate this and other doctrines on this very day, 492 years ago? Would we be here today gathered together with our parents and children and friends? What will be the state of the Lutheran church 492 years from now, if we do not take our stand and defend justification? How can we not help but do just that, when we know and believe that justification is life, that it is the forgiveness of sins, it is our hope and comfort, that I am justified by faith and not by my works, but by Christ alone. How can I not take my stand? Yes, the cost is great. It could mean our lives. But when we sing, *Ein Feste Burg ist Unser Gott*, we know that our God will be our "mighty fortress, a trusty shield and weapon", he will give me the strength to stand firm, as Luther did. Will you take your stand with me today?

To God alone be the glory! Amen.

*Lord, keep us steadfast in your Word;
Curb those who by deceit or sword
Would seek to overthrow your Son
And to destroy what he has done.*

*Lord Jesus Christ, your power make known
For you are Lord of lords alone;
Defend your Christendom that we
May sing your praise eternally.*

*O Comforter of priceless worth,
Send peace and unity on earth.
Support us in our final strife,
And lead us out of death to life.*

Christian Worship, 203 (Martin Luther, 1483-1546)