

SAKLC CONVERSATIONS

Mid-week adult study at St Armands Key Lutheran Church, Sarasota, FL

“ROMANS, a letter for today”

Session Plan for

Thursday, January 12, 2017

A JOINT DECLARATION OF OUR FAITH IN GOD: (Psalm 46)

(Men) ¹God is our refuge and strength, a proven help in trouble. ²Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea; ³though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult.

(Women) ⁴There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High. ⁵God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be moved; God will help it when the morning dawns. ⁶The nations are in an uproar, the kingdoms totter; He utters his voice, the earth melts. ⁷ The Lord of hosts is with us; The God of Jacob is our refuge.

(All) ⁸Come, behold the works of the Lord; see what desolations he has brought on the earth. ⁹ He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow, and shatters the spear; He burns the shields with fire. ¹⁰“Be still, and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations; I am exalted in the earth.” ¹¹The Lords of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.

OPENING PASTORAL PRAYER

A) OBJECTIVES FOR THIS SESSION:

1. To review the impact that Scripture – as the authority for the church - had on Martin Luther and several other reformers during the 16th century. Observations being based on insights gained from our immediate past study: “*A Man Named Martin*,” and from the new Kerygma Resource Book: “**ROMANS, a letter for today.**”
2. To discuss the key principle of the Reformation—*sola scriptura, sola fide, sola gratia*, –and the meaning, thereof, for the church in our time.

3. To consider the Reformation phrase – *the priesthood of all believers* – and its meaning for the church in the early 16th century and in our time
4. To consider the meaning of the slogan: **ECCLESIA REFORMATA SEMPER REFORMANDA SECUNDUM VERBI DEI**, “*the church reformed, always being reformed according to the word of God.*” for the church both in the 16th century and in the 21st century.

B) SESSION SCRIPTURE FOCUS: ROMANS 1:16-17 (NRSV)

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, “The one who is righteous will live by faith.”

C) LOOKING AT COMMON THINGS MOST TAKE FOR GRANTED:

1. A **Bible** that we can read and understand
2. A **church** in which we can worship God, grow in grace, and share God’s love with all

Several quick Questions for Reflection: (relating directly to #C, above)

- a) Do you remember the versions of the Bible that you heard or read as you were growing up?
- b) At present, which Scripture version do you read and study from most often?
- c) Why do you prefer the specific version you use?
- d) What is the impact of a particular translation for you?
- e) From a recent “Café,” do you remember how this church, “SAKLC,” began?
- f) Who were the people who started SAKLC? .. What led them to its formation?
- g) What were some of the issues that concerned the founders of “SAKLC”?

- h) How are those issues similar to or different from our current concerns?
- i) How did the ELCA [Evangelical Lutheran Church in America], with which this church is denominationally affiliated, form?
- j) Do we have any links to geographic regions where the church was being reformed during the 16th century?

D) How the unfolding of Scripture allowed Luther and others to discover GOD –

1. A Monologue by Martin Luther (1483-1546):

(Luther is known to have given lectures on **Romans** in the year 1515, while he was a Roman Catholic priest and a Professor at Wittenberg University. This was at a time when he was severely struggling with matters of personal faith. Much later in life he wrote about his encounter with the *Book of Romans* in this Monologue (dated 1545) contained within the “Preface” to the *Complete Edition of Luther’s Latin Works*:)

“I had conceived a burning desire to understand what Paul meant in his Letter to the Romans, but thus far there had stood in my way, not the cold blood around my heart, but that one word which is in chapter one: “The justice of God is revealed in it.”¹ I hated that word, “justice of God,” which ... [I understood as] that justice by which God is just and by which he punishes sinners and the unjust.

But I, blameless monk that I was, felt that before God I was a sinner with an extremely troubled conscience. I couldn’t be sure that God was appeased by my satisfaction. I did not love, no, rather I hated the just God who punishes sinners. In silence, if I did not blaspheme, then certainly I grumbled vehemently and got angry at God. I said, “Isn’t it enough that we miserable sinners, lost for all eternity because of original sin, are oppressed by every kind of calamity through the Ten Commandments? Why does God heap sorrow upon sorrow through the Gospel and through the Gospel threaten us with his justice and his wrath?” This was how I was raging with wild and disturbed conscience. I constantly badgered St. Paul about that spot in Romans 1 and anxiously wanted to know what he meant.

I meditated night and day on those words until at last, by the mercy of God, I paid attention to their context: “The justice of God is revealed in it, as it is written: ‘The just person lives by faith.’ ” ... I began to understand that this verse means that the justice of God is revealed through the Gospel, but it is a passive justice, i.e. that by which the merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written: “The just person lives by faith.” All at once I felt that I had been born again and entered into paradise itself through open gates. Immediately I saw the whole of Scripture in a different light. I ran through the Scriptures from memory and found that other terms had analogous meanings, e.g., the work of God, that is, what God works in us; the power of God, by which he makes us powerful; the wisdom of God, by which he makes us wise; the strength of God, the salvation of God, the glory of God.”

footnote:¹ The word translated here as “justice” may also be translated “righteousness.”

2. Luther’s Statement before the Emperor and Electors at Worms, April 1521:

“Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Holy Scriptures or by evident reason—for I can believe neither pope nor councils alone, as it is clear that they have erred repeatedly and contradicted themselves—I consider myself convicted by the testimony of Holy Scripture, which is my basis; my conscience is captive to the Word of God. Thus I cannot and will not recant, because acting against one’s conscience is neither safe nor sound. God help me. Amen.

“Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise. God help me. Amen.”

3. “A POSTCARD FROM PATMOS”

(This is a totally factitious document depicting how Luther might have described events when he was at the Wartburg Castle after his 1521 conviction at the Diet of Worms for being a heretic. This ‘Postcard’ was adapted by M. Heely from the classic biography of Luther, “Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther,” written by Roland Bainton.)

“I am not dead. Missing, but not dead. My prince, Frederick the Wise, decided to hide me, instructing members of his court to make arrangements without divulging the details, so of this our brave prince could with honesty claim no knowledge.

I was not at all happy about this plan. I wanted to return to Wittenberg to face—I don't know what, because I was not permitted to go there.

I was traveling in a wagon with a few companions. As we entered the woods outside the village of Eisenach, armed men on horseback came upon us. Cursing and making a great show of violence, they dragged me to the ground. In on the ruse, my friend played his part and railed at my abductors in return. I was then thrown on a horse and lead around for an entire day. At 11 o'clock that night I was taken to the ancient fortress at Wartburg—and was kept there alone, but for the owls and bats.

The outward peril was nothing in comparison to my inner struggle. Alone in the darkness with my thoughts and recriminations about all that had happened, the prince of darkness constantly challenging, "Are you alone wise? Have so many centuries gone wrong? What if you are in error and are taking so many others with you to eternal damnation?"

After a night of this torment, I rose in the morning and threw open the window to look out at the fair Thuringian hills. I could see a distant cloud of smoke rising from the pits of charcoal burners. A gust of wind lifted and dispersed the cloud. With that, my doubts dispelled and my faith was restored.

This lasted until the next onslaught of self-accusations. If I was not in error, then was I sufficiently firm in the defense of the truth? My conscience troubles me because at Worms I yielded to the importunity of my friends and did not play the part of Elijah. If I were but permitted a sequel they would hear more from me.

Here in this idle solitude there are a thousand battles with Satan. Often I fall and am lifted again by God's right hand. I am not completely alone; there is the warden and two serving boys. But they are neither company nor confessors. Nor can I make them my confidants. I am in disguise having put off my monk's cowl and grown a long beard.

I did not want to come here. I wanted to be in the fray. I had rather burn on live coals than rot here. There was only one cure for loneliness and depression—work. And so, I am not idle on "my Patmos." I have written a

book about Revelation, a work on confession, expositions of Psalms 67 and 36, and a commentary on the Magnificat. I have made use of my knowledge of Latin and of the original languages of the Scriptures—Hebrew and Greek—to translate the New Testament into German, my mother tongue. Enough for one year; I will attempt to translate the Old Testament at a later time.”

Questions for Reflection: (relating directly to Luther’s statements above)

- a) Imagine that you had an opportunity to interview Martin Luther; what questions would you like to ask him?
- b) What sustained Luther as he took his stand for what his convictions and study of Scripture led him to believe and to espouse?
- c) What is the charge to us and to all believers in cultivating a “*conscience that is captive to the Word of God,*” and what are the challenges?

E) SEVERAL REFORMERS BORN BEFORE LUTHER

1. **John Wycliffe (1329-1384)** – an English pastor, Wycliffe preached against the sins of his times. He organized college graduates into teams of traveling preachers, and is remembered particularly for translating the Bible into English.

2. **John Hus (1369-1415)** – in Prague, Bohemia, Huss preached against immoralities and tried to reform the church. He met a martyr’s death by being burned alive.

3. **Girolamo Savonarola (1452-1498)** – An Italian reformer and famous preacher, he tried to bring about a moral and spiritual revival in Florence, Italy. He, too, was burned as a heretic.

4. **Thomas a’ Kempis (1380-1471)** – In the Netherlands, the Brethren of the Common Life urged service and devotion. Thomas expressed their thought in his famous Imitation of Christ.

F) REFORMERS WHO WERE LUTHER’S CONTEMPORARIES:

1. **Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531)** – deeply influenced by Luther, he introduced reformation principles to Switzerland. He disagreed with Luther over the teaching of the ‘Real Presence’ during Holy Communion.

2. **John Calvin (1509-1564)** – A French lawyer, he fled his country because of his criticism of the church. In Switzerland, he became a pastor and established a theocracy to make Geneva the “*Rome of Protestantism.*” Though the project failed, Calvin became the leader of the reformed branch of Protestantism. His theological writings, *Institutes*, are famous for their system of Christian thought.

3. **Thomas Cranmer (1489-1556)** – He was the first Protestant Archbishop of Canterbury and the leader of the English Reformation; helped King Henry VIII make the Church of England independent of Rome. Cranmer is regarded as the principal author of the Anglican statement of faith, the *Thirty-Nine Articles*. He was burned at the stake when Mary Tudor, a Catholic, came to the throne.

4. **John Knox (1505-1572)** – a Scottish reformer, he spent some years in Geneva in exile during Catholic persecution. Becoming a disciple of Calvin, he returned home in 1559 to openly challenge Rome. He won Scotland to his form of Calvinism (the Presbyterian Church).

5. **Ignatius Loyola (1495-1556)** – a leader of the Counter-Reformation movement that began within the Roman Catholic Church during the height of the Reformation. Many conscientious leaders realized that much of the criticism of the church was justified. The *Council of Trent (1562-63)* called for the founding of new religious orders, new definitions of doctrine, and some minor internal changes. Loyola was founder of the missionary-minded *Jesuit Order* and one of the strongest leaders of the Counter Reformation movement.

G) THE ‘SOLIS’: (GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF THE REFORMATION THEN AND NOW):

[Dr. Calvin Roetzel, NT Scholar, retired Professor @ U. of Minnesota, a member of the Presbyterian Church, and author of our Kerygma Resource Book on Romans, describes some of the changes that were launched as reform took hold. See the section: “*The Reformation and its impact,*” pgs. 6-8 and the “*Timeline of Events*” pg. 9]

1. **Sola scriptura – by *Scripture alone***. This phrase emphasized the Bible as the primary authority for the church and the basis of all preaching and teaching. It did not discount the importance of councils and creeds, nor did it discount the importance of the work of interpretation and study of Scripture.
2. **Sola fide – by *Faith Alone***. Faith is not simply belief, but complete trust in God’s redemptive work in Jesus Christ.

3. **Sola gratia – by Grace Alone.** Grace is God’s action on our behalf in Jesus Christ.

More Questions for Reflection: (relating directly to #G, above)

- a) Why do you think that these terms gained such widespread usage as watchwords of the Reformation?
- b) How do these terms relate to one another? That is, how do faith, grace and the Bible as the authority for the church go together?
- c) What meaning do these phrases have in our time?
- d) Do they have meaning for SAKLC and our life together as a Christian community?
- e) For you, as an individual, which phrase is a particularly helpful slogan or reminder?

H) THE PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS

Facilitator’s summary statement: The ending of monasticism within Protestant churches coincided with the rise of the teaching of *The Priesthood Of All Believers*. There were to be no select or special vocations through which believers could serve God. Accordingly, the call to live holy lives extended to all, not just to pastors and clergy. With the translation of the Bible into the languages of the people, all could study the Scriptures and grow as disciples through Bible study, prayer and other practices of the Christian faith.

Questions for Reflection: (relating directly to #H, above)

- a) What is your profession? Do/did you view your work as a “calling”? What difference does an understanding of “calling” make in how you do your work or view your profession?
- b) How is your faith evident in the places where you work/play/interact with others?
- c) Have you talked about your faith or Christianity at your workplace? What do Christians need to be mindful of in talking about faith in the workplace?

I) ECCLESIA REFORMATA SEMPER REFORMANDA SECUNDUM VERBI DEI

"the church reformed, and always being reformed according to the word of God."

Facilitator's Summary statement: Within modern-day Protestantism, the motto: ***ECCLESIA REFORMATA SEMPER REFORMANDA*** is sometimes being used to challenge both conservative and liberal impulses toward the ongoing need for reforms in contemporary Christendom. The motto does not bless either preservation for preservation's sake or change for change's sake.

In the 16th-century context, the impulse it reflected was neither liberal nor conservative, but radical, in the sense of returning to the "*root*." Luther and other reformers believed the church had become corrupt, so change was needed. But, it was a change in the interest of preservation and restoration of more authentic faith and life— a church reformed and always to be reformed according to the Word of God. The cultural assumption of the Reformers' day was that what is older is better.

This is strange to our contemporary ears. We do not share this assumption; if anything, we applaud the "*new*" and "*innovative*." But one of the serious charges church authorities hurled at the Reformers was that they were "*innovating*." One of Luther's contemporaries, John Calvin, responded to this and other charges in his treatise "*The Necessity of Reforming the Church*." (1536) As Calvin put it, "*We are accused of rash and impious innovation for having ventured to propose any change at all [in] the former state of the Church.*" He then went on to counter that they were not "*innovating*," but restoring the church to its true nature, purified from the "*innovations*" that riddled the church through centuries of inattention to Scripture and theological laxity. The appeal was to a more ancient source, Scripture—"sola scriptura" (Scripture alone).

According to church historian David Steinmetz, by submitting themselves to Scripture, the churches of the Reformation movement were purging themselves of these unwanted "*innovations*" and returning to a more ancient and therefore purer form of church life.

What the motto does not mean

- a) *Newer is always better.*

Using the motto to back up any and all "*innovations*" would be a misuse of the original intent. In many places where the original slogan: "*ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda*" appears, the phrase is completed with a clarifying addition so that it now reads: ***ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda secundum verbi dei***, which translates, "*reformed and always being reformed according to the Word of God.*" **Reform, where it is advocated, must find its grounding in Scripture.**

b) *The church can reform itself.*

Another potential misuse of the phrase is lodged in a common modern mistranslation as "*reformed and always reforming.*" This can mislead us to believe that the church is the agent of its own reformation. **God is the sole agent of reformation.** The church is rather the object of God's reforming work. God's agency and initiative have priority here. The church is God's church, a creature of God's Word and Spirit. God's Word and Spirit guide the church's forming and reforming.

Questions for Final Reflection:

- a) When considering reform, we as a church should..... ?
- b) As members of the church in this 21st century, 500 years after Luther's Reformation, what have we learned?

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