

October 27, 2024 – Reformation Sunday

“Set Free” by Pastor Julio Romero

Gospel: John 8:31-36

Today we celebrate the Reformation of the Church that took place more than five hundred years ago. To remember this event is to remember the person who sparked the Reformation, the Great Reformer Martin Luther.

It is said that one day Martin Luther was with his good friend and great theologian Phillip Melanchthon, who said to Martin Luther:

“This day you and I will discuss the governance of the universe.” What Luther said in response was unexpected: “This day you and I will go fishing and leave the governance of the universe to God.”

That is an amazing response from Martin Luther, a response that suggests and indicates trust, confidence, and total faith in the God who years earlier had been looked at with fear, and distrust, and was regarded as cold, distant and total impersonal by Martin Luther.

Martin Luther was an Augustinian monk who, in his quest to please God and gain acceptance by God, went to extremes, to the point of punishing himself for his shortcomings, for failing to live a life free of sin. He went to confession daily, but not even confession and the words of absolution were enough for him.

Let’s not forget that confession was a regular and necessary part of monastic life. Just to give you one example of how seriously those monks took confession, there is the story of a brother monk of Martin Luther who came to his confessor and said, ‘Father, I have sinned. Yesterday at lunchtime I coveted Brother Philip’s potato salad.’ (You wonder how much trouble a monk can get into in a monastery?). The father Confessor would hear the confession, grant priestly absolution, and assign a small penance to be performed. That was it. The whole transaction took only a few minutes. Not so with Brother Luther. He was driving his Father Confessor to

distraction. Luther was not satisfied with a brief recitation of his sins. He wanted to make sure that no sin in his life was left unconfessed. He entered the confessional and stayed for hours every day.

Martin Luther lived in daily fear of the immediate judgment of God on his life. He said on one occasion, “If I could believe that God was not angry with me, I would stand on my head for joy.” He became more distressed with the enormity of his own sins and his inability to satisfy a righteous God.

For me, this doesn’t sound like the same Martin Luther talking to his good friend Phillip Melancthon, telling him “Let’s go fishing and leave the governance of the universe to God”.

What we have here is a liberated person, free of fear, free of any burden, free of guilt, a man with total trust in God, total confidence in a gracious God whose works are works of mercy and grace and in whose caring hands we are safe.

What is it that made this man named Martin Luther go from a fearful, tormented, and distressful person to someone so free, so secure, confident and full of trust in God?

He found the truth about God in the Bible, in the Holy Scriptures. As he was studying the Bible, Martin Luther found the liberating words, the Good News in the Book of Romans, in the third chapter where it says, “*Since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith*” .

Then in the Letter to the Ephesians, Chapter 2 he read this:

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not the result of works, so that no one may boast.”

I bet that was the day Martin Luther stood on his head for joy, because those words gave him freedom. Those were liberating words, and that is what the Good News of the Gospel is about. They free us from our fears, they renew the right relationship with God, they announce our salvation. The Gospel presents a picture for us in which we hear God telling us to be free, free from any kind of bondage, slavery, or anything

that hinders freedom, anything that gets in our way to use our gifts for our own good and for the good of others. The Gospel sets us free to love life, to go fishing, to enjoy the fruits of your hard work and the smell of a cup of coffee early in the morning. The Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ sets us free to see our blessings in the love of those who are close to us, to see God at work in and through us as we engage in the task of helping and serving others.

The big news of the Gospel is that God loves us, that in His infinite and deep love for us He became one of us to show us the way and to set us free from death. That is the ultimate evil that you and I will meet one day but it will not prevail over us because of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, and his empty tomb and resurrection. We are in good hands, in the hands of God. All we need to do is to let God govern our lives, govern the universe and come to Him in our moments of weakness, assured that He will liberate us, have mercy on us and gives us rest, so that we can be the person we have been created to be.

Today we are going to present Teddy, my grandson, to God, to the loving, merciful and gracious God, not to the God that Martin Luther feared, dreaded, and wanted to hide from. Teddy will be presented and baptized by the God that made Martin Luther free, the God that helped Martin Luther to love his life by trusting in His mercy and grace.

It will be up to you parents, and to all of us who love Teddy to make sure that this is the God Teddy will grow up loving and having a relationship with, but the crucial thing here is that in order for us to help Teddy to know and believe in a gracious, loving and forgiving God, we need to believe, trust and know God first. Otherwise, this day will be a day only for the family photo album, that will look good on one of the bookshelves at home. Parents, remember the baptismal promises you will make to Teddy today, so that he will grow believing and trusting in the God who loves him, and set him free from the power of sin and death. *Amen.*

