

This is Reformation Sunday, although not exactly Reformation 'Day'. October 31st is the anniversary of that bold, faithful day when Martin Luther posted his 95 Theses on the door of the Castle Church in Germany. Through these 95 statements or concerns, Luther questioned the excess and abuses occurring within the Roman Catholic Church, specifically having to do with indulgences. These documents, created and sold by the 16th century Roman Catholic Church, falsely promised divine forgiveness of sin, had no biblical basis, and served only to raise money for the construction of St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome, Italy...which they did quite profitably.

This Festival of the Reformation is somewhat unique to the Lutheran Church and has historically been the occasion for divisive anti-Roman Catholic sermons and demonstrations by some Lutheran Pastors in some Lutheran congregations. Such behavior is directly contrary to Martin Luther's attempt to unify and clarify the Church and should never be repeated or tolerated. This is not to be observed as a triumphal festival as if all error has once and for all been purged from the Church. The Festival of the Reformation is a recalling of the revolutionary, cleansing, timeless Word of God which is constantly renewing and reforming the Church. Although we refer, historically, to Reformation as a 'Day' or time, reformation is an ongoing reality within Christ's Church, the developing and reforming 'body of Christ'.

Our Bishop, along with being a fine leader and a valued, personal friend, has his pilot's license. He has spoken about the importance of accurate coordinates when flying. If you are flying from Columbus, Ohio to Dayton, Ohio and are off by a degree or two, you are still likely to arrive in the general Dayton area. If, though, you are flying from Columbus, Ohio to Seattle, Washington and are off by a degree or two, you'll arrive far from the location you intended. In other

words, accurate coordinates are of increasing importance for a long trip.

This is the point Jesus is making in our Gospel Lesson this morning. This is the point Martin Luther was making when he wrote and posted his 95 Theses. The Word of God/The Bible serves as a sort of 'compass' or GPS...God's Positioning System...for the Christian journey, serving to keep us on track...living and serving and growing in the right direction toward God's intended destination!

Clearly the Jews mentioned in this morning's Gospel had gotten away from God's Word...what we now call The Pentateuch, the first 5 books of The Old Testament. Although verse 31 indicates these were *'the Jews who had believed'* Jesus, they were failing to *'hold to'* Jesus' teaching. Looking at John 8:31 in three different versions of The Bible may provide us increased clarity as to the timeless truth Jesus is making: The Message/ *'If you stick with this, living out what I tell you, you are my disciples for sure.'* The Living Bible reads/ *'You are truly my disciples if you live as I tell you.'* The J.B. Phillips New Testament presents it this way/ *'If you are faithful to what I have said, you are truly my disciples.'* Stick with what Jesus has taught us, live out what Jesus tells us, and be faithful to what he has said brings the assurance of a God-guided life and true discipleship.

Evidence that even the believing Jews had gotten 'off course' is revealed in their badly mistaken-memory that they *'are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves to anyone.'* History, and Scripture, consistently records show that the Israelites were captured and enslaved more than nearly any other nations on earth. For example, had these believing Jews totally forgotten how the Israelites were held as Egyptian slaves for some 4 centuries?

Jesus, though, refuses to enter into an historical argument and, instead, takes them back to the Word. Jesus mentions the

experience of slavery, particularly slavery to sin, and how it excludes that person from a *'permanent place in the family'*. Jesus contrasts this with sonship and how the children of God are assured a permanent place in God's family. The only freedom that is everlasting is the freedom granted to us by *'the Son'* of God, Jesus Christ!

Jesus tells us all, people of every generation, that he is *'the Way and the Truth and the Life'*. Jesus tells us all, people of every generation, that when we hold to his teaching, we are truly his disciples that this is the truth, and *'the truth will set you free'*.

Our world, and our country in particular, seems badly *'off course'* and to be operating according to coordinates that will take us where we dare not go. As we are less than 10 days away from our national privilege of voting, I urge you to:

- take advantage of this long fought-for and defended right
- do so in an increasing knowledge of God's Word
- be aware of the ongoing need for God's Church to follow His divine-coordinates, and
- be committed to our Christ-given commission to introduce others to God the Father and His Son, our Savior Jesus Christ.

WHY?

'If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.' I offer that this is reason enough!

Amen.