**Reformation Sunday**

**October 25, 2020**

**Text—Romans 3:19-28**

Most of you probably recall that three years ago, the Lutheran Church all around the world celebrated the five hundredth anniversary of the beginnings of the Protestant Reformation. On October 31, 1517, Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the door of the castle church in Wittenberg, sparking a theological and political controversy that would eventually cause a major schism in the Western church. This date is rightfully recognized as the first major event in Reformation history; however, one might argue that other dates and events further down the line were more important. One such event was the Diet of Worms, which was an assembly of the rulers of the Holy Roman Empire, of which Martin Luther’s Germany was a part. On April 16-18, 1521, the emperor and princes of the Empire met together in the German city of Worms. A major item on the agenda of the Diet of Worms was the question of Luther and his teachings. When Luther arrived at the Diet, he was shown a table full of books he had written and ordered to recant the “errors” he had taught in them. After taking a day to think about it, Luther appeared before the Diet again, and refused to recant, even though he knew it would probably mean execution. According to tradition, at the end of his speech, Luther uttered these famous words: “Here I stand, I can do no other. May God help me. Amen.” So Luther did not back down, and his teachings continued to spread far and wide throughout Europe, and eventually, the entire world.

What was it, exactly, that Martin Luther was standing for? What teachings did he consider so important that he would risk his life to uphold them? Well, there are many things that we could list, but it might be helpful just to go with the three *solas* of the Reformation: *sola Scriptura, sola gratia, sola fide*. Scripture alone, grace alone, faith alone. First, Scripture alone: the teaching that all doctrines of the church must be based upon Scripture, and those that are not must be rejected. Much of Roman Catholic doctrine in the sixteenth century had come from sources other than Scripture, and much of it flatly contradicted the Bible. *Sola Scriptura* taught that the written Word of God was the only true source of authority in the church, and that later theologians could not add to or take away from it. Secondly, we have grace alone: the teaching that human beings can be saved only by God’s mercy, and nothing that they do could earn eternal life for them. The church in Luther’s day was teaching that Jesus died for humanity’s sins, but people also needed to do their part if they wanted to be saved. Against this falsehood, Luther taught that people’s original sin made them utterly unworthy to inherit eternal life, but God had shown them mercy by sending Jesus to win eternal life for them. Their sins would be forgiven, not by anything that they did, but because of what Jesus had done. Finally, we have faith alone: the teaching that it is only faith in Jesus Christ that can receive the benefits of his death and resurrection. Going to church, reading the Bible, or receiving the Sacraments would do nothing for you unless you believed Jesus’ promises. The church at the time was teaching that the Sacraments in particular worked just by virtue of doing the action. It didn’t matter what the state of your heart was; as long as you went through the motions, you’d be fine. But Luther instead taught that one must have faith, or trust, in Jesus Christ to be saved, and in fact only this faith could save you. These teachings, along with many others, were the reason that Luther was on trial at the Diet of Worms, and yet he refused to reject them. He could have been safe if he had just recanted, but he would not do so, because the Word of God had captivated his conscience. He would stand on the teachings of Scripture alone, grace alone, and faith alone, and he would not allow himself to be threatened into forsaking them. And because of his courage, we here at Trinity Lutheran Church can believe and confess these things as well.

So that’s what Luther stood for back in 1521. But with the five hundredth anniversary of the Diet of Worms coming up in a few months, it’s worth asking ourselves as a church what *we* stand for now. Of course, our situation is very different than Martin Luther’s was. We are dealing with different problems and different opponents. And we, like Luther, seem to be standing at a rather pivotal point in history, one that has great implications for the church’s teachings and ministry in the future. For Luther, the major issues were Scripture, grace, and faith. What about us? What are the major issues that we face today? Where do we as the church of the twenty-first century need to stand?

Well, perhaps the first thing that needs to be said right now is that we as a church stand for racial equality and racial reconciliation. We believe what the Scriptures say, that all people are created in the image of God, no matter what their skin color may be. We believe that all people are equal in that they are all sinners deserving nothing but punishment, but also in that Jesus shed his blood to save them all. As St. Paul says in Galatians 3:28: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” In Christ, we have all been formed into one people, destined to live eternally in the new heavens and earth together. Therefore, we reject anything that would claim that any race of people is inferior to another, or that any race of people is intrinsically evil, or that any race of people has solely caused all of the problems of this world. We also reject any attempt to solve the evils of racism by creating more division, demonizing any group of people, or using violence to try to force an agenda. We reject the tactics of social media mobs and twitter bullies. Instead, we learn from the example of the black Christian minister Martin Luther King, Jr., and seek to win over our enemies through love. That is the Christian solution to the problem of racism, and it is the one that we will pursue here. We recognize that Jesus Christ is the only true hope for reconciliation between people groups, and so we will dedicate ourselves ever more fervently to him and his teachings. At Trinity Lutheran Church, we stand for racial equality and racial reconciliation through faith in Jesus Christ.

We as a church also stand for the sanctity of human life. Trinity boasts a proud history of being involved in Lutherans for Life and other such organizations. I know that this will continue in the years and decades ahead. We stand for the value of every single human life as a person created by God, and thus as deserving of love, respect, and protection. We stand with the most vulnerable people of this world whose lives or livelihoods are threatened: the poor, the elderly, children, the unborn, and unwed mothers. We will do everything we can to preserve and enrich the lives of these groups and others who are in need. We will serve the needy in our community and help provide them with all they need to support this body and life. We will stand against anything that threatens the lives or livelihoods of anyone: we stand against abortion, euthanasia, human trafficking, exploitation, extortion, and the like. We will speak the truth of God’s Word on these matters to anyone who opposes it, whether it be individuals, organizations, or even the government itself. We do this because this is what our Lord calls us to do: to stand up for those who cannot stand up for themselves. At Trinity Lutheran Church, we stand for the sanctity of human life.

We also stand for God’s design for human sexuality, marriage, and personhood. Lately, this aspect of God’s creation has come under great attack, as our society has wholeheartedly embraced premarital sex, cohabitation, adultery, divorce, same-sex marriage, and even transgenderism. The very nature of what it means to be a human is being called into question: are we created by God the way he wants us to be, or do we allow our subjective feelings to determine who or what we “really” are? Do we use our bodies in ways that are consistent with how God created us, or do we thwart his design for our lives? Do we try to change who we are and thus take God’s job into our own hands, or do we accept ourselves and the way God made us? Do we respect God’s gift of marriage as a lifelong, monogamous union of one man and one woman, or do we settle for something less than that? We know where God’s Word and his natural Law would have us stand: squarely on the side of traditional approaches to marriage and sexuality. We will do everything we can at this congregation to promote healthy marriages and families. We will do everything we can to comfort and assist those who have been broken and abused by the sexual revolution. And we will do everything we can to publicly advocate for God’s design in these matters, so that our society will see that not everyone has given in, that there are still plenty of people who want to do God’s will and fulfill his Law. This is stance that will put us squarely on “the wrong side of history” in some people’s minds, but it is a stance that we must take to remain faithful to the Word of God. At Trinity Lutheran Church, we stand for God’s design for sexuality, marriage, and personhood.

And finally, we will still stand for the exact same thing Martin Luther stood for: the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We will continue to stand in the place he occupied five hundred years ago with his teachings of *sola Scriptura, sola gratia, and sola fide*. We will uphold Scripture as the written Word of God, and thus the only infallible source of doctrine and practice for the church. We will proclaim that we are sinners in need of God’s grace, which he has poured out upon us abundantly through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And we will teach that we can only receive God’s gifts through faith in Jesus, and not by our own good works to earn them. This is the fundamental core of the Christian Gospel, and it will always be the basis of the message we proclaim at this congregation. Other organizations can take up the causes of racial equality, life issues, and issues of marriage and sexuality, but only the Christian Church can proclaim the Gospel. The Gospel is what will set us apart from the rest of the world, and not our stances on hot-button political issues. Those matters are certainly important, but they do not define the core of our identity as Christians or as Lutherans. Only the Gospel of Jesus Christ does that, and so at Trinity Lutheran Church, we stand for the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Like Martin Luther, we do live in interesting times. We do live in a society where there is a lot of controversy about religion, morality, and a host of other issues. So like Luther, we at Trinity Lutheran Church will need to stand firm. We need to stand for racial equality and reconciliation, for the sanctity of human life, and for God’s design for marriage, sexuality, and personhood. Most importantly, we need to stand for the Gospel of Jesus Christ in a world where that Gospel has increasingly come under attack. I, for one, plan on standing unapologetically for what the Word of God teaches, and I hope that you too will stand here with me. As the old saying goes, united we stand, and divided we fall, so I pray that we might stand united behind the true teachings of Scripture and the Gospel. And we know that we do not stand alone: our Lord Jesus Christ stands with us as well, and he will never leave us or forsake us. Martin Luther may be our example, but Jesus Christ is the one who enables us to follow in his footsteps. So here we stand, we can do no other. May God help us. Amen.