

SERMON – PASTOR GREG GRAHAM
29/10/2023

REFORMATION 2023. Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Today we remember the that we are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Let us pray. A few facts to begin with. MARTIN LUTHER was born in 1483 in Germany. He was ordained as a Catholic priest 1507. He struggled to find peace with God. He struggled to find assurance of salvation. He struggled with his own sin. He struggled with the demands that his church was placing upon him. And so he wrote questions to the church which are called the 95 Theses and on the 31st October 1517 they were published. The Pope excommunicated him in 1521. In 1525 he married a former nun- Katherine and they had four children. Luther died in 1546- 62 years old. And he never wanted a church named after him: “I ask that my name be left silent and people not call themselves Lutheran, but rather Christians. Who is Luther? The doctrine is not mine. I have been crucified for no one. St. Paul in 1 Cor. 3:4-5 would not suffer that the Christians should call themselves of Paul or of Peter, but Christian. How should I, a poor stinking bag of worms, become so that the children of Christ are named with my unholy name? It should not be dear friends. Let us extinguish all factious names and be called Christians whose doctrine we have. The pope’s men rightly have a factious name because they are not satisfied with the doctrine and name of Christ and want to be with the pope, who is their master. I have not been and will not be a master. Along with the church I have the one general teaching of Christ who alone is our master. Matt. 23:8.” However, the name ‘Lutheran’ stayed and the Lutheran Church was created. Why?

The answer lies in the confession that was given to Emperor Charles V and the Catholic Church. It is called the Augsburg Confession and was given in 1530- 23 years after Luther’s 95 theses. The central article and the main argument centred on the question of JUSTIFICATION: CA IV: It also taught among us that we cannot obtain forgiveness of sin and righteousness before God by our own merits, works, or satisfactions, but that we receive forgiveness of sin and become righteous before God by grace, for Christ’s sake, through faith, when we believe that Christ suffered for us and that for his sake our sin is forgiven and righteousness and eternal life are given to us. For God will regard and reckon this faith as righteousness as Paul says in Romans 3:21-26 and 4:5 In other words: we are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Christ alone. Grace alone. Holy Scripture alone. But as the Lutheran confessions say again and again: Faith is never alone- where there is faith, there are good works- not to gain salvation but to thank God and to bear witness to His love for all the world.

So many wars are fought so that people might be free. I often think of Mel Gibson playing the role of a Scottish rebel- William Wallace- as he died at the hands of the English. His last word was ‘freedom!’ The current war in Israel is also a cry for freedom- the Jewish people want the freedom to live in peace in the land they lived in for nearly 4000 years and the Palestinian people want to live in the land they have lived in for even longer.

WW I, WW II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War and so on are fought on the premise of freedom- freedom to determine how we are to live for ourselves. We don't want anyone telling us what to do. And that goes all the way back to Adam and Eve.

And that is why Jesus said: John 8:34: "*I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin....*" I could quote so many texts to you that tells us of this profound and terrible reality: Genesis 6:5; Psalm 51; Romans 1:21; Romans 3:10; Ephesians 2:1 and on and on the terrible litany goes. We are born to bondage to sin and we cannot free ourselves and that is why there is Christmas and that is why there is Easter- that is why Jesus said and says: John 8:36: "*So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed*".

And the freedom that Jesus gives us real freedom- freedom to live as the adopted children of God- freedom to live as citizens of God's holy kingdom- freedom to live under and in God's light, love and life. Freedom to go God's way and not our way. Real freedom to live under God and His Son Jesus Christ.

And that is why we remember the anniversary of the Reformation because there the Gospel of Jesus Christ was brought to the fore once again. Luther did not discover it- it was always there but it had become covered over. Every church and every Christian needs to be challenged and reminded of why the Eternal Son of God became one of us and died that terrible death- to free us to live with him- for ever and ever. Amen.