

Rev. Janet Doyle
Elmer Presbyterian Church
Reformation Sunday
October 30, 2022
Scripture: Psalm 32; Romans 8:1-4

Sermon: Wiped Clean

In July 1505, a young lawyer entered an Augustinian monastery. This was a place isolated from the outside world. God was to be the only focus, every waking moment of every day. Yet this young man, even in the safety of the monastery, was tormented. He did not feel worthy to be in God's presence. He was anxious and desperate for an escape from his sins. He greatly feared the coming wrath of God.

The young monk would confess for hours and still be deeply troubled that he may have forgotten something. He was afraid even one sin would cost him his eternity in heaven. The monk would shake with fright when taking communion. Confession, escaping the sinful world, serving as a monk, and meditating on God seemed unable to offer him any peace of mind or peace of his salvation.

An older monk, seeing the pain this monk was experiencing every day suggested he go study God's Word more deeply at theology school. Who was this young monk? The monk was Martin Luther.

In 1515, Martin Luther was lecturing on the Letter to the Romans. He later wrote "that it was the first chapter of that epistle that he found the solution to his difficulties." Luther read Romans 1:16-17 which reads, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, 'The righteous shall live by faith.'"

Luther finally understood that there is not one thing apart from faith that one can do for salvation. No work can earn this righteousness. Salvation comes by faith alone, in Christ alone.

It is important to confess our sins, but he realized that we cannot earn our salvation. Luther was liberated! His effort to earn his salvation

was impossible. Luther had been born again into a new understanding about his life and about his faith and his eternity. With this new understanding, God used Martin Luther to launch the world into a reformation. Luther's discovery brought the focus back to faith in God rather than working and striving to save ourselves.

Even though Martin Luther was praying, singing hymns, mediating, teaching, seeking after God all day long, he still couldn't save himself. We all need the saving, cleansing power of Jesus who died on the cross for each one of us. Salvation comes by faith in Christ alone. It is, in fact, the cry of the protestant reformation: Sola Fide! It means 'in faith alone.' Today marks our remembrance and celebration of the Protestant Reformation.

The Protestant Reformation that began with Martin Luther in 1517 played a key role in the development of the North American colonies and eventually becoming the United States of America. The Protestant Reformation was a religious reform movement that swept through Europe in the 1500s. It resulted in the creation of a branch of Christianity called Protestantism, which separated from the Roman Catholic Church due to differences in doctrine, church polity and the sacraments of the church.

We usually celebrate the start of the Protestant Reformation as October 31, 1517, the day Martin Luther published a document, called **95 Theses** and challenged the Roman Catholic Church's indulgence system, which allowed people to purchase a certificate of pardon for the punishment of their sins. Luther argued against the practice of buying or earning forgiveness, believing instead that salvation is a gift God gives to those who have faith.

Most of the challenges to the Roman Catholic Church revolved around the notion that individual believers should be less dependent on the Roman Catholic Church, its pope and priests and instead become more dependent on their relationship with God and taking personal responsibility for their faith.

Today, as we remember the Reformation we are reminded of all the saints of the church that have been a part of this Reformation over the centuries. People that have put the Bible into our hands, and the

Bible into other languages so all could read for themselves the love and forgiveness of Jesus our Savior. Many have died for their challenges to the church and government over the centuries.

Martin Luther loved reading and studying the Letter of Paul to the Romans for this is the letter that changed his life and thinking about forgiveness and faith. He said “This letter is truly the most important piece in the New Testament. It is the purest Gospel. It is well worth a Christian’s while, not only to memorize it word for word, but also to occupy himself with it daily, as though it were the daily bread of the soul.”

Listen to what Luther says about how the Letter to the Romans changed his thinking: “Faith is a living, unshakeable confidence in God’s grace; it is so certain, that someone would die a thousand times for it. This kind of trust in and knowledge of God’s grace makes a person joyful, confident, and happy with regard to God and all creatures. This is what the Holy Spirit does by faith.”

We read Romans chapter 8 this morning because Martin Luther loved this letter to the Romans and this chapter explains to us how we have been set free from sin. Verse 1 says, “There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” We are free when we confess our sins and believing that Jesus took our place on the cross sets us free. Yet, so many of us still struggle with sin and guilt in our lives even when we have faith in Christ. When we continue to struggle with sin and guilt in our lives we fail to truly enjoy life and freedom in Christ Jesus.

2 Corinthians says, “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” The ultimate example of God bearing the guilt of our sin is accomplished in the work of Jesus on the cross. So many in our world don’t believe that. Many live in guilt and never find freedom and forgiveness in Christ.

In Hebrews 9:28, scripture says, “So Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.”

Sin damages our mind, body and soul but conversely, confession and forgiveness liberates and frees us and brings healing, life and breath to the will, mind, body and soul.

Corporate and individual confession, that we experience together every Sunday, is a historic part of Reformed worship. We say the Prayer of Confession together and we have an Assurance of Forgiveness that reassures us that we don't have to live in sin or live in guilt; we are declared forgiven and given new life, the old has passed away the new has begun. Martin Luther lived this and believed it was true. Martin Luther found freedom from his guilt by finding life in Christ.

Psalm 32, that we read this morning, reminds us that the best way to think of forgiveness is that of a weight lifted from your life. True confession is expressed with words to God in full repentance of heart and soul. As Psalm 32 teaches us, once sins are forgiven it leads to evangelism so that others will also know God's mercy and grace and freedom. When we confess our sins to God, God wipes clean our life of sin and replaces it with a clean heart and renews a right spirit within us.

Forgiveness is found in Christ alone. Psalm 32, written by David, tells us how to remove the stain of sin in our lives. The burden of guilt is taken away, our sin is wiped clean, and we are forgiven.

Verse 11 states, "Rejoice in the Lord and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart."

In the final verse of Psalm 32, David makes it clear that rejoicing is expected for those who really know the forgiveness of God.

When we know forgiveness in Christ alone we have something to shout about. Have you experienced this kind of forgiveness? Will you rejoice in the forgiveness of Jesus?

"Oh, what joy for those whose disobedience is forgiven, whose sin is put out of sight! Yes, what joy for those whose record the Lord has cleared of guilt, whose lives are lived in complete honesty!" (Psalm 32:1-2)

Live your life serving the Lord and rejoicing in the power of God's forgiveness because you are wiped clean.