Sermon: **Reformation** (A) Gospel Lesson: John 8:31-36 (Reform texts) 10/25/2026
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Today is Reformation Sunday and as good Lutherans, we celebrate the day that Martin Luther laid the foundation for Protestantism. His movement led to the creation of Lutheran and other Protestant churches, changing the religious and political landscape of Europe. Martin Luther sparked the 16th-century Protestant Reformation by challenging Catholic practices - like the sale of indulgences and asserting that salvation comes through faith alone rather than church deeds.

Luther formulated a core theology and went around preaching that salvation is a free gift of God's grace received through faith alone, and that the Bible - not papal or church tradition - is the ultimate religious authority. The invention of the printing press occurred within this timeframe so when Luther went around campaigning, you know…handing out fliers and posting his platform (with ninety-five points) on doors, it sparked an international debate. When summoned by the pope, Luther refused to recant his writings and was excommunicated from the church in 1521. He also refused to retract his teachings, resulting in his condemnation as an imperial outlaw. Congratulations, you just completed your first year of Lutheran confirmation!

Yes, this is a quick overview of why we are here today, wearing red, adorning our sanctuary in red, and…reading the same biblical texts that have been read for decades. But in all honesty, what does Reformation mean for the church today? Why do we still celebrate this historical event? How does Luther's message from the Middle Ages translate into the 21st century? So much has changed. Are Luther's words even relevant? I don't have any desire to return to the Middle Ages. I believe the death of Christendom is actually an opportunity for resurrection. And while I believe that celebrating this wonderful festival day for the church is important, I also feel a strong conviction to take a deeper look at what *is* at the heart of our faith…a faith that lives out the boundless love and grace of God in Christ for all peoples of the world. What is a more generous way forward to tend to the ancient wisdom entrusted to us and lead us as people of faith to discern where the church needs to be reformed given our current state of affairs?

I wonder what would Luther say to us today? What would he say to the people who aren't looking for a gracious God – but a God used in ways to justify injustice? Perhaps it *is* in our best interest today to take a an honest look at where we are, who

we are, and how we find ourselves floundering in the same old patterns of corruption, same old systemic patterns of racial discrimination, same old economic exploitation, same old wars, same old oppression, ravaged lands, broken relationships, political divide, and same old self-serving justification projects. Maybe it is time to re-form our way of thinking, re-store relationships and re-new God's intention for his beloved people.

I think the prophet Jeremiah in our reading today, is shouting at the top of his lungs to us when he speaks of a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. God is going to forgive their iniquities and God is going to forget. The same old, same old will give way to something new. You see, after the Babylonians moved to town, they destroyed the kingly succession promised to David (some 400 hundred years earlier), destroyed the temple, and destroyed the
belief that Jerusalem was invincible. And destroyed their confidence in a God who didn't seem as powerful as they were led to believe. Doubt seeps in. Sin settles in. And their faith falters.

But the days are surely coming, says Jeremiah, where God will usher in a new covenant - a covenant in which the law of God will be written on
their hearts - not like the covenant of old where Moses came with the law. Where people were coaxed into faith and teaching would be required. No…the new covenant that God promises the people will reside deep, deep down inside of them and they *all* will know God. But the clincher here is what makes this covenant possible: God is going to forgive their iniquity and remember their sins no more. Whoa! Now if I were the people of Israel, I would offer a huge sigh of relief. Whew! A clean slate.
Can you believe it, a slate!

Yup! God is going to forgive their iniquities - their harmful practices, their wayward thinking and brokenness. But God goes one step further…not only does he forgive the people….he forgets what they have done…altogether! God develops amnesia! I wonder what that looks like in my life today, maybe yours, too. I wonder if it would free me us from a cycle of guilt, shame and unforgiveness. You see, God's heartbreak over the people's unfaithfulness reveals a God who is in love with his people. Yes, sin and separation forge deep chasms in relationships with one another…but they also separate us from a God who is always re-forming us; continually welcoming us back.

What if *we* lived … forgiving and forgetting…the harm that has been done to us AND the harm we have done to others, or ourselves? What if *we lived* with the same relentless determination to preserve our relationships that God had for his beloved people? What if the church lived with the conviction - the truth - you know…the truth that sets us free when we didn't, don't and still do…get "it" right today? What if we didn't welcome the stranger today or didn't standup and speak out for the injustice and harm that racism, gender inequality, oppression and war have caused/ and cause for our neighbors. What would the world look like if that was the case? God does not operate in the "same old systemic patterns, but out of a love which forgives and forgets. God contradicts, as Walter Brueggemann says, "the seething rage that is everywhere - voiced and acted out." You see, where there is no forgiveness and no forgetting, society is fated to replay forever the same old hostilities, resentments, and alienations. What forgiveness accomplishes if to break the vicious cycles of deathly repetition."

God…chose… to forget. He forgot the whole golden calf thing; the worship of foreign gods, the unfaithfulness of the people… Wipe the slate clean. A new beginning. You know, there are few things I wish I could forget. Indeed a number of things - the minor slight or injury of another; the painful things I've said over the years to people I love the most. You know, those things you are unable to let go of: to forgive and forget. It's hard. Thank goodness we are invited daily into a re-forming of sorts.

Loving God, is about loving people. And loving people with enduring devotion, dignity and depth, even when you don't feel like it, even when they don't deserve it, this is the kind of love that actively pursues what God loves. And hopefully I (maybe you, too) are learning that the core from which we are re-forming is NOT of our own doing; not a set of moralist laws, political ideals or a list of 'do's and don't's and don't you dares. The core from which we are re-forming is the same love that shaped Israel and held them together. It is the same form of love that Martin Luther passionately wrestled with and boldly spoke of to people from all walks of life...it is the love that we receive, and the grace that is gifted which re-shapes us, re-forms us and transforms us…every, single day. So Martin, we're still at it…and we're still wearing red! Amen.