

ReForm: John 14:1-6

This past October was the 500th anniversary of a period of time known as the Reformation. It began in Wittenberg Germany in the 1500's when Martin Luther and some of his buddies wanted to reform the church. At the time there was no separation of church and state, the church was the government. They wanted to make changes more in accordance with Scripture, faith and grace. He had 95 ideas on how to reform the church posted on a wall in Wittenberg Germany for public discussion.

A whole lot of people began aligning themselves with much of what Luther and the others who were part of the movement had to say and began protesting the protesters became known as "Protestants". This was the beginning of one of the periods that changed the course of Western Civilization. But unless you're a history buff who care? What does that have to do with you and me, it happened five hundred years ago?

Like every business, school and organization The Reformation reminds us that not only does the church continually reform itself as time goes on the same is true of our individual faith. If you were fortunate enough to grow up in a Christian home where your parents took you to church and Sunday School on a regular basis, then you received basic faith formation. That's one of the things I love so much about this congregation is that I know that if our children are regular in attending S.S., Confirmation and youth group they will have received solid faith formation.

But each of us comes to that time in life when that faith is no longer the faith of our parents it either becomes our own or it doesn't. That Sunday School faith gets reformed. It happens when that Sunday school faith (Jesus loves me this I know for The Bible tells me so)

gets challenged by life. At our Synod assembly two weeks ago our bishop talked about a time in her life over a period of two years where her husband had a brain aneurysm, they had a child born with special needs and she was diagnosed with breast cancer. Everything she thought she believed about God she questioned, her faith was going to be reformed and changed she just didn't know how in the middle of all of this.

She asked herself questions like, what do I have to hang onto anymore? Does Jesus really love me even though The Bible tells me so? You know the questions!!! Many of us have asked them ourselves when it feels like our world is collapsing. You know them deep down when the seemingly simple Sunday phrases don't seem to cut it. You know those times when faith is being tested and you know your faith is going to be different, it's going to be reformed you're just now sure how.

What she did is she hung on to the promises made to her in her baptism about being formed in the image of God, the promises received every time she took communion about being forgiven, promises about this world not being all there is---Like the promise from John 14 and trusting that God would hang in there with her even when she wasn't sure if she could hang in there with God. The more she hung onto those promises she found strength to endure.

And just like her---your faith and mine gets reformed and refined by life. It matures it becomes an enduring faith, not because it answers all the unanswerable questions about life, not because it protects us from disease or disaster. Rather our faith gets reformed and it matures and becomes an enduring faith precisely because we've learned we CAN trust those promises from The Lord and we didn't give up on those promises and we discovered that the promises endure and outlast the tough times.

Yes our faith does get reformed and eventually we come back full circle and discover that the Sunday school faith is a faith for the real world—Yes Jesus loves you, yes Jesus loves me The Bible tells us so.

TransForm: Romans 12:1-2

We've been working this theme Form, ReForm and Transform all year long because that's how real faith works, it's never static. It's like the cells of the human body always regenerating and changing. That's what transformation is all about. Paul reminds us in the passage from Romans "Be transformed by the renewing of your mind".

We often are transformed by things we experience in life. Events like marriage, birth, travel, illness all kinds of events, some of which are joyful some of which are painful have the power to be transformational because they shape what we do, they shape our attitudes and how we act. You don't always know which of the life events it will be until it happens but when you get transformed you know it because you don't see God, your life and the world in the same way.

Here's what's so important about transformation being linked to the renewing of your mind and how it's used in the passage. The Apostle Paul takes very seriously when it comes to faith what we all know to be true in other areas of life, the training of our intellect. Our minds are always being trained by what we let into them, the questions is what are we letting in?

Think about it--We all know that what we allow into our minds is very important. When you take a job usually there's some kind of orientation or training so you know what to do.

People go to school for years in many occupations to learn how to do something. The training of the mind is really important.

Why because if we acted only on emotions we'd all be in trouble. What would happen if you acted on your emotions when somebody cuts you off or exhibits their inability to merge onto the freeway? What if you acted on every emotion you have when you have an argument with someone you love? Some emotions are really good to act on but overall it's a pretty good idea to be able to tell which are and are not good to act on. You gain that wisdom and ability to discern by learning.

Paul's not calling for an emotionless faith. Because Scripture elsewhere says **"If you confess with your lips and believe in your heart that God raised Jesus from the dead you will be saved"**. In other words the Bible recognizes the importance of both the head and the heart in faith---we need both. But we do need to make sure our minds do get renewed. So really it begs the question are we taking any steps in our life to transform our faith by the renewing of our mind.

And the beauty of renewing our mind is that you never know when you'll need to call on the stuff you've put in there. You might find yourself facing an obstacle, small or big, you might find yourself coming up against a wall of doubt, you may face a life changing crisis and if we haven't fed our minds or renewed our minds we may not be equipped. So Paul encourages to renew our minds, to not just fill it with good things or positive saying, rather to fill out minds with Scripture and with the things of God so that ultimately our faith might be transformed.