

THE MESSAGE for October 31, 2010**Luke 5:33-39****The Rev. Dr. R. K. Miller*****Kingdom Reforming***

Growing up church was a big part of my world. Every Sunday morning my mother would drag us to the 8:30 worship service at Trinity Lutheran Church in Bedford, PA. She insisted on going to church every week – no excuses. The thought of missing church never crossed my mind. I just assumed everybody went to church somewhere.

Now being one of nine children we took up a whole pew in worship. We didn't sneak into worship; we paraded into worship, usually at 8:29. My mother insisted that we sit up front on the right side – no excuses. Anytime I walk into a church somewhere for worship some mysterious force draws me to sit up here, in the front, on the right side, third row.

Now you may find this hard to believe but I never could sit still in worship. I'm number 6 in the family line-up and I was constantly crawling under the pews, getting up and walking around, or turning around to see who was sitting behind us. I still do those things.

One day when I was around two a woman approached my mother after worship and said, "Well Janie, it looks like you finally got one that won't sit still." My mother reminds me of that from time to time, in a loving way, of course. I still can't sit still in worship.

I tell you all of that to tell you this. The church, especially the Lutheran Church, has always been and will always be a big part of my life. And I thank my parents for that. I thank God for that. I am a Lutheran Christian to the core of my being because of my parent's faith in God and their faith in the Lutheran Church.

I was also exposed to the ways of the Catholic Church. My parents decided to send us to the Catholic grade school. I spent three years in that prison... I mean place. Learning from the guards... I mean nuns. The warden, sorry, the principal, Sister Mary was tough, and mean, and down right nasty. Or so I remember. The name "Mary" means "sea of bitterness." She lived her name. All of the nuns were tough and mean and nasty. I think it was a prerequisite. None of them ever smiled. I think that was a prerequisite too.

Interestingly, they never made me feel welcomed. I always felt like an outsider, "a Lutheran," a second class student, someone, who in their eyes, didn't quite measure up. Of course, what I was learning about religion and faith from the Catholic perspective often clashed with our Lutheran perspective. My parents reassured me that I was Lutheran not Catholic.

I remember wrestling with the contradiction of these two churches – seemingly similar yet very different theologies and teachings and lifestyles – one driven by guilt the other driven by grace. I realized at an early age that we might profess we worship the same God but we sure don't agree on how that should be done.

As a teenager I remember sitting in our Lutheran worship service thinking there's got to be a better way of being and doing church. I was around 13 or 14 at the time. Ask any 13 or 14 year old today and they will probably tell you the same thing. I dare you to ask them what they think about the church and listen to what they say. Otherwise they'd be here... in worship... wouldn't they?

I have not stopped thinking or believing that there is a better way of being and doing church.

That was confirmed for me when I was in college. A friend of mine, we'll call him Carl, was a devoted Catholic. I was a devoted Lutheran. We never talked religion but we did talk about our respective churches. I was always trying to get him to come with me to the Lutheran Church and he was always trying to get me to come with him to the Catholic Church.

One Sunday I decided to go with him. I don't remember much about it but I do remember this. I was not mentally prepared for all the kneeling and strange hand motions and everyone knowing what to say and do without reading it in the hymnal or bulletin somewhere. I did not feel welcomed.

When it came time for communion, Carl leaned over and said that I could not participate in communion. It was for Catholics only. Now, I knew that from my grade school days. So I decided to see what would happen if I went up for communion. Anytime some one says that "I can't do something," that's an invitation for me to at least try.

So after Carl got up and started up the aisle I waited until after someone walked by I jumped in line behind them and headed up for communion too. Just as I got to the priest, Carl, saw me. And being the good Catholic that he is, he turned and said to the priest. "Father, he's not Catholic." I stood there with a big smile on my face. The priest looked at me, smiled back, gave me a blessing, and sent me on my way just like the priests used to do when I was in grade school.

I wasn't surprised, a little embarrassed, but truly thankful for that experience. It reminded me once again that there's got to be a better way of being and to doing church, together. That's probably why God called me to become a parish pastor. There's got to be a better way because I have come to realize that grace is grace.

We worship a God of grace or so we say we do. The Bible tells us that we do. Grace isn't for some and not for others or it isn't grace. God's amazing grace is for one and all not for just a select few that see themselves as the frozen chosen called, the church.

That was the basis for the work of the Reformers in the 1500's. It was about God's grace, which cannot be bought or earned but is free for everyone through faith. God's grace is free and for everyone. So this group of Reformers in the 1500's felt there was a better way of being and doing church, and they decided to do something about it. The one church – the Roman Catholic Church – needed reformed.

Check out his video it reveals the basis of what Luther saw as needing reformed in the church of his day...

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=osQkhNW-lpM&feature=fvw>

The Reformation did affect both church and state and has been doing so ever since. The Reformers, especially Luther, brought needed change to the church. But these changes ended up being too difficult for too many people.

Truth is, Luther never intended to start a Lutheran Church. He simply wanted to talk about and address some of the issues he saw the church doing that were in contradiction to what the Bible taught – regarding matters of faith and grace and forgiveness.

When Luther sat down to list his concerns he ended up with 95 issues. 95 concerns that he wanted to talk about and clarify. Copies of Luther's 95 Theses are available from the ushers following worship. We made a copy for each family. If we run out we'll make more. So make sure you take a copy...

A conversation about these 95 concerns wasn't to be in Luther's day. So the Reformers started other churches, which in that day could have cost you your life. These new churches became known as Protestant churches with names like: Lutherans, Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, and many others. The church universal continues to be in the process of reforming itself, seeking new ways to be and do church.

I invite you to consider the possibility that the Reformation was not a one-time event in 1500's but see it as an ongoing event everyday. Because God is constantly calling us to reform, God is always doing something new.

That's what I have come to learn over the years as a parish pastor. *God is always doing something new.* Say that with me... *God is always doing something new.*

That was the message Jesus brought and lived by. Jesus speaks of a new thing that God is doing in him and through him for the sake of the world that God loves. Listen now to our reading from Luke's Gospel the 5th chapter. (*Read Luke 5:33-39.*)

Luke points out that Jesus isn't like the other leaders and his disciples don't act like other disciples. They don't fit the norm. The Pharisees and the disciples of John the Baptist have a problem. They have a problem because Jesus and his disciples aren't religious enough for them. Luther and the reformers were not religious enough in their day.

Jesus, as the leader of a movement not the leader of a religion, is questioned. Notice, how Jesus refuses to get into an argument about trivial religious stuff. He shows no interest in arguing the points and details of a religious life, as the Pharisees loved to do. Jesus is clear on two very important points:

First Point: The Kingdom of God is coming into the world and should be celebrated by one and all.

That's what Jesus and his disciples are doing. Hence the "wedding feast" language. They are celebrating. The Kingdom of God has come into the world through Jesus. (Sing *Hallelujah!*) And this reforming movement that Jesus brings into the world is for everyone. (Sing again, *Hallelujah!*) Sing that with me, *Hallelujah!* That was pretty good!

Second Point: This new thing that God is doing in the world through Jesus cannot and will not fit into any previous religious model or structure or paradigm.

It is so new that not only will some people not like the taste of it. It's actually dangerous to the old religious way of life promoted by the Pharisees. Jesus' message was so new that it was incompatible with the existing religious system. God was reforming the Kingdom on earth.

I'm going to take a risk here and invite you to consider this parable and how it applies to us here at Friedens. Jesus says, "*You cannot put new wine into old wine skins. So don't do it. Many people who have tasted the new will not like it but say the old is good...*"

I wonder, how this might applies to us and the new wine skin of our contemporary worship verses the old wine skin of our traditional worship. Both are important. There is a place for the new and the old. But that's not the point Jesus is making. Jesus' point is this. *God is doing a new thing by reforming the Kingdom on earth.* The new wine needs to be put into new wine skins, according to Jesus. Think about it. Pray about it. That's all I'm saying.

Today we celebrate Reformation Sunday. And yet, it is more than just a celebration. It's reality. It's part of who we are. It's a way of life. We are reformers, not protestors. Say that with me, *we are reformers.* It's part of our DNA.

As reformers then we are called to be open to new thing God is pouring into this place. Are we?

1. Are you - are you open to the new thing God is pouring into this place? I hope so because of God's grace...
2. Are we holding onto religious things like the Pharisees that prevent the new wine from being poured to the new wine skin? I hope we don't because of God's grace...
3. Are you open and willing to follow the new direction God is calling us to take in order for more and more people to experience the faith, and the grace, and the forgiveness that is ours in Christ Jesus? I pray so because of God's grace...

The Reformation was not a one-time event that only happened back in the 1500's. It's an ongoing event in our lives everyday. God is constantly calling us to reform, because God is always doing something new even as we speak. So be it for Jesus' sake. Amen.