



Liturgical Day: Reformation Sunday

Date: October 25, 2009

Sermon Title: The Voice of God

Grace to you and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today is Reformation Sunday – a festival we celebrate each year on the last Sunday in October. It is a time to remember that in 1517, on the eve of All Saint's Day (or, as they referred to it then: *All Hallowed's Eve*), Dr. Martin Luther – an unknown Augustinian monk and Old Testament professor – made his way to the community bulletin board in Wittenberg, Germany (which was the front door of the castle church). There he posted a list of ninety-five complaints he had about the church of his day. This simple act set off a chain of events that would have him excommunicated within three-and-a-half years. But within a decade, a movement that eventually bore his name would spread throughout Europe, and then across the whole face of the earth. This movement, which began with one man and his list of complaints on October 31, 1517, would grow in ways that he could never have imagined. Today some eight million people in our own country call themselves Lutherans, and there are more than 60 million Lutherans world-wide.



Our usual practice on Reformation Sunday is to study Jeremiah 31 or John 8, both of which bear strong reformation themes of being freed from sin by the new covenant God is making with us in Jesus Christ. Or some times we'll look at Romans 3, which was pivotal in the development of Luther's understanding of the Gospel. This year, of course, we are working our way through the Bible in 90 days, and my sermon is going to focus on the book of Job. That may well be appropriate, though, on this day when we honor Martin Luther and his reformation colleagues. We turn to the Old Testament, as Luther himself often did. He was an Old Testament professor after all, and no doubt studied the book of Job carefully.

Job is a unique book in our Bible. It is set in the time of the Patriarchs – Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It begins with a very troubling scene where Satan and God are holding a conversation. God brags about the faithfulness of Job. Satan claims that Job is only faithful because he is wealthy and comfortable. God grants Satan permission to ruin Job's life, so the two of them can figure out whether or not Job's faithfulness is rooted in his good fortune, or his relationship with God. You saw Job and God allude to that in this morning's skit. That's the hardest aspect of this book. As I said in my mid-week devotional, sometimes we don't know what or how much to learn from this book.

The turning point of this story comes at the very end, though, and that is our focus for today. Job loses everything. He argues with his best friends for three dozen chapters. Then Job meets God. It isn't an easy meeting. Job, who had been angry at God for some time, is overwhelmed by God's presence, and the words that God speaks. It finally occurs to Job that even though he thinks life has been unfair to him, God is one who knows far more than Job. And part of faithfulness is putting aside our own preconceived notions, our own vain attempts to understand it all, our own desire to play God's role – faith has to do with putting that all aside, and learning to trust in God instead.

Martin Luther had a similar experience of God's power in his life. Many of you know that story. Luther grew up in a church which demanded that he

LESSONS

JEREMIAH 31:31-34

PSALM 46 (7)

ROMANS 3:19-28

JOHN 8:31-36

BIBLE IN 90 DAYS
READING

JOB 38:1-11

PRAYER OF THE DAY

**ALMIGHTY GOD,
GRACIOUS LORD, WE
THANK YOU THAT YOUR
HOLY SPIRIT RENEWS
THE CHURCH IN EVERY
AGE. POUR OUT YOUR
HOLY SPIRIT ON YOUR
FAITHFUL PEOPLE. KEEP
THEM STEADFAST IN
YOUR WORD, PROTECT
AND COMFORT THEM IN
TIMES OF TRIAL, DEFEND
THEM AGAINST ALL
ENEMIES OF THE GOSPEL,
AND BESTOW ON THE
CHURCH YOUR SAVING
PEACE, THROUGH JESUS
CHRIST, OUR SAVIOR
AND LORD, WHO LIVES
AND REIGNS WITH YOU
AND THE HOLY SPIRIT,
ONE GOD, NOW AND
FOREVER. AMEN.**

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earn God's love. And so he tried. He was one of the most devout people of his day. He earnestly prayed and read the scriptures and worshipped and served, but no matter how hard he tried, he never seemed able to do enough to be certain that God was pleased with him. Eventually he, like Job, had a meeting with God. Luther didn't sit down face-to-face with God as Job did. But he met God in the writings of the Apostle Paul. It finally occurred to Luther that trying so hard to earn God's favor was rooted in his own desire to save himself. It was only when he put that all aside, and learned to trust God, that he began to experience a faith that wasn't shrouded in doubt. It was only when he gave up trying to earn his own salvation, and began to trust in the God who was trying to give it to him as a gift, that he had a faith he could trust.

Luther and Job had this important experience in common: they had each come to misunderstand the relationship God was making with them, and it was only when they heard God's voice, that they were able to step away from their own misconceptions, and grow into a faith that was rooted in the powerful presence of God in their lives. It was the voice of God that turned them around.

Do you ever wonder why we don't hear the voice of God today? I've heard a couple of people say this week that if someone claimed to have heard God's voice, like Luther and Job did, that we would probably lock them up, or heavily medicate them. By today's standards, both Job and Martin Luther would have run the risk of being confined to a mental health center.

The Bible teaches us, though, and we believe, that God's voice continues to speak to the faithful. And what's more, there is a power in God's voice – the power to change lives. So how do we hear God's voice? We need to be attentive to the ways that God has spoken to people throughout history.

God's voice speaks to us through the Scriptures. That is one of the strong themes of the Lutheran Reformation. Luther and his colleagues believed in the power of God's word. They understood that if they could get the people to read the Bible, God would reform the church. That is why we began this "Bible in 90 Days" program at Saint Peter. We too believe that when we turn to the Scriptures, God's voice speaks to us, and we hope some of that will happen for us this fall. Perhaps a good way to hear God's voice – perhaps a good way to celebrate the Reformation would be to commit ourselves to daily time with God's word.

God's voice speaks to us through the liturgy. I've often heard Lutherans say that we don't memorize Bible verses the way our Baptist or Pentecostal friends. They are half right. We may not memorize in the same way, but we certainly have plenty of Scriptures committed to memory.

- "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, God who is faithful and just will forgive our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.
- "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."
- "Worthy is Christ, the Lamb who was slain, whose blood set us free to be people of God."
- Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world."

Perhaps a good way to hear God's voice – perhaps a good way to celebrate the Reformation – would be to allow the words of the liturgy to find their way into our hearts, and shape the way we understand ourselves, our God and our faith.

God's voice speaks to us through the gathered community. There are many reasons that churches exist. We've been talking a bit about that at Saint Peter lately. We understand that through the church, God welcomes us into a grace that will carry us through and beyond this life. We understand that through the church, God sends us to make a difference in the world that surrounds us. It is also true that through the church, we are surrounded by brothers and sisters in faith. And one of the ways God speaks to us is through them. When a Stephen Minister cares for us in a time of difficulty or transition; when a Sunday School teacher helps us to discover something new about God's word; when a Catechism guide models for us what it means to be a person of faith; when a small group meets and discusses together a common interest or common struggle; when a 12-step group gathers to help each other in the quest for sobriety... in all of these ways, through the community that surrounds us, God's voice speaks, and we are comforted, encouraged, challenged and guided. Perhaps a good way to hear God's voice – perhaps a good way to celebrate the Reformation – would be to be drawn into this community we call church, and be touched by the brothers and sisters in faith who meet us there.

The pivotal turn in the book of Job comes in the forty-second chapter, just a little ways past the reading that has been our focus for this morning. Let me share it with you.

Then Job answered the Lord: "I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. 'Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?' Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know... I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes."ⁱ

It is the voice of God that turns Job's life around. Job responds faithfully, acknowledging that he doesn't know everything, and humbly asking God to forgive him and put him right. The New Testament will come to call that repentance.

This morning, we pray that we too might hear the voice of God. Through the Scriptures, through the liturgy, through the community – may God speak to us, call us to repentance, and give us the gift of a new beginning. A new beginning that is rooted in the faithfulness of God. A new beginning that is grounded in the grace of Jesus Christ. A new beginning that allows us to live with hope and joy.

Amen.

David J. Risendal, Pastor (October 24, 2009)

Gospel Lesson; English Text:ⁱⁱ

^{8.31} Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples;³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."³³ They answered him, "We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying, 'You will be made free?'"³⁴ Jesus answered them, "Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin.³⁵ The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there forever.³⁶ So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed."ⁱⁱⁱ

Gospel Lesson; Greek Text:

^{8.31} ἔλεγεν οὖν ὁ Ἰησοῦς πρὸς τοὺς πεπιστευκότας αὐτῷ Ἰουδαίους ἐὰν ὑμεῖς μείνητε ἐν τῷ λόγῳ τῷ ἐμῷ, ἀληθῶς μαθηταὶ μου ἔστε³² καὶ γνώσεσθε τὴν ἀλήθειαν, καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια ἐλευθερώσει ὑμᾶς.³³ ἀπεκρίθησαν πρὸς αὐτόν σπέρμα Ἀβραάμ ἔσμεν καὶ οὐδενὶ δεδουλεύκαμεν πώποτε πῶς σὺ λέγεις ὅτι ἐλεύθεροι γενήσεσθε;³⁴ ἀπεκρίθη αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι πᾶς ὁ ποιῶν τὴν ἁμαρτίαν δούλος ἐστὶν τῆς ἁμαρτίας. ³⁵ ὁ δὲ δούλος οὐ μένει ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα, ὁ υἱὸς μένει εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα.³⁶ ἐὰν οὖν ὁ υἱὸς ὑμᾶς ἐλευθερώσῃ, ὄντως ἐλεύθεροι ἔσεσθε.^{iv}

"The Bible in 90 Days" Lesson:

^{38:1} Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind:² "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?³ Gird up your loins like a man, I will question you, and you shall declare to me.⁴ "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding.⁵ Who determined its measurements—surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it?⁶ On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone⁷ when the morning stars sang together and all the heavenly beings^a shouted for joy?⁸ "Or who shut in the sea with doors when it burst out from the womb?⁹ when I made the clouds its garment, and thick darkness its swaddling band,¹⁰ and prescribed bounds for it, and set bars and doors,¹¹ and said, 'Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud

ⁱ Job 42:1-3, 4-6 New Revised Version Bible (C)1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

ⁱⁱ A list of Bible lessons for the coming weeks is available at <http://www.elca.org/Growing-In-Faith/Worship/Lectionary.aspx>

ⁱⁱⁱ St. John 8:31-35, New Revised Standard Version Bible (© 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America).

^{iv} St. St. John 8:31-35, The Greek New Testament, Aland, Kurt, Black, Matthew, Martini, Carlo M., Metzger, Bruce M., and Wikgren, Allen, (© 1983, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft Stuttgart).

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**Scheduled Readings for
"The Bible in 90 Days"
9/13/2009 - 12/12/2009**

<u>Date</u>	<u>Begin Reading At</u>	<u>Sermon Based On</u>
9/13	Genesis 1:1	Genesis 1:1-19
9/20	Leviticus 1:1	Exodus 16:2-15
9/27	Deuteronomy 23:12	Deuteronomy 6:1-9
10/4	1 Samuel 28:20	Joshua 24:1-3, 14-18
10/11	1 Chronicles 1:1	1 Kings 3:5-12
10/18	Nehemiah 13:15	Nehemiah 1:4-11a
10/25	Psalms 89:14	Job 38:1-11
11/1	Isaiah 14:1	Psalms 104:24-34, 35b
11/8	Jeremiah 33:23	Isaiah 25:6-9
11/15	Daniel 9:1	Ezekiel 2:1-5
11/22	Matthew 26:57	Micah 6:1-8
11/29	Acts 6:8	John 20:19-31
12/6	Hebrews 1:1	Romans 5:1-11

^v Job 38:1-11, New Revised Version Bible (© 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America).