

-What a delight to be with everyone this Sunday, the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation, and Confirmation Sunday. It is truly a Sunday of celebration, of joy, and, I believe of hope.

-Though when I was writing this sermon and at first started off with "Happy Reformation Sunday", it seemed a little cheap. Because, the Reformation was anything but happy.. It was a movement that reignited a "call to faith" but in doing so caused many people to lose their lives. Martin Luther, in many ways, did not realize the bond fire that he was going to start with his single match. The Reformation was "free-for-all" moment of history that divided a lot of Europe and continues to divide many church bodies to this day. All of it, I would suggest, was based on a single deep question: "Who is God?" Is God the bringer of wrath, waiting to throw you into the fires of Hell if you don't get yourself in order? Or is God more than just a judge, but a divine that brings grace and love to world desperately seeking relationship?

-Who is God? This is a question that many died over not only in the 30 years war within the heat of the Reformation but other conflicts arising hundreds of years following the initial Reformation. So what could be easier than to have at our last class our Confirmation students solve this question once and for all?!

-These three boys stepped up to this challenging question with incredible maturity and insight. We talked about this question at length and then I encouraged them to formulate a faith statement. This faith statement, I hope, will serve as a snapshot in time to a hopefully ever changing and growing faith. It will be something that they can take with them on their life journeys and look back to in order to see where they have been.

-You know, if Martin Luther were here, I think he would wholeheartedly approve of how these young men formulated their faith on paper.

- "To me, God is a friend, a teacher, a brother, a father, a teammate, a coach, a doctor, a magician, and a part of me. God is someone I can rely on , someone who can get me through the day," one of them wrote.

-Another wrote, "It is big for me when I'm in the wilderness and I love it. I feel closer to him when I'm out in it. When I am alone and it's quiet, then I hear the breeze through the trees, I know he is there."

-The book of Jeremiah states: "But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, "Know the Lord," for they shall all know me." This was a radical shift in thinking from current practice in the time of Jeremiah. Here you have this beleaguered nation of Israel who has just been taken into exile, the Temple and the 10 Commandments tablets lost forever, who feel like God has abandoned them. Yet God is willing to come back and instead of write down some formal covenant again on some tablets that can be lost, instead, will "write it on their

hearts.” Is this truly a new concept for a covenant or is it rediscovering something that was forgotten?

-Anathea Portier-Young, professor at Duke Divinity School, writes: “Heart (Hebrew *lev* and *levav*) is a word that Jeremiah uses again and again -- 65 times in all. This prominence highlights an important theme in Jeremiah, namely the rediscovery of embodied awareness, thoughts, disposition, choices, and actions of God’s people.”

-It seems to me in all three of these young men this morning, the embodied awareness and connection to God was there a long time ago, and is continuing to be re-discovered and embodied.

-One student writes: “As I grow older and understand religion more, I get closer to him. More and more everyday and I understand his work and notice it in people and things.”

-So as we celebrate 500 years of reformation, maybe what is worth celebrating is not a new discovery, but a re-discovery of something already present in each and everyone of us.

-Dr. Kathryn Schifferdecker, professor at Luther Seminary, writes: “Martin Luther did not believe that he had discovered something radically new in Scripture when he found there the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith. He re-discovered a treasure that the church of his day had largely lost. The movement he began was as much a restoration as a reformation -- the rediscovery of God's abundant grace in the new covenant established in and through Jesus Christ.”

-Another Confirmation student writes: “God to me is a symbol that no matter what you, your family, a friend, or a stranger do, you will be okay and loved by God. God to me is a higher power and there for you with a loving heart and open arms.” When I read this, I wonder, does re-discovering an embodied awareness of God mean that we are asking the same types of questions today? I don’t think so. What this student is describing is a God of relationship, a God who reaches out and connects with all of us no matter who we are.

-For many in Martin Luther’s time, the struggle with “who is God” was based on salvation, punishment, and judgement. (This was the theme of last night’s debate at the Harvest Dinner with Martin Luther and Lucifer, it’s was pretty intense). Luther’s agony his entire life and, to be honest, why his theology was so revolutionary was because it was wrestling with a dark ages notion of: is God going to save me from Hell and damnation? This question was on the minds of everybody in Luther’s time.

-I don’t think this is the question that our church today or the Confirmation students (the church of the future) struggle with. In re-discovering an embodied awareness of God, we have come across some different questions for the reformation in our day. The struggle more relevant to our Confirmation students and our church and world, I believe, is not “will God save us from fire and damnation”, but “will God save us from ourselves?”

-Many times in class, our group has talked about some of the brutal realities of high school. Bowen, Cade, and Aric have each talked about struggles with fitting in or getting challenged by the way they may do or look or talk differently. I remember one of them saying: "Kids that come after you or feel like they have to make fun of you mostly do it because they have to puff themselves up. It really doesn't have a lot to do with you, but mostly them"

-We live in a world where our society is constantly looking for ways to feed it's ego, even if that feeding of ego hurts people and creation. Martin Luther talks about a God being anything "that your heart is completely turned to." For him in his time, it was a battle of the heart turning completely towards either Satan or God. For us, it seems to be a battle of the heart turning towards God or turning completely towards ourselves.

-We see this not just in high school but nationally and internationally: healthcare, environment, disaster relief, and war just to name a few.

-Who is God? Not us. This is the challenge for our church and for Cade, Bowen, and Aric right here and right now. You know what? I think we are up to it.

-Cade, Bowen, and Aric: you are up for the task of proclaiming who God is in this world. It has been one of the honors of my life to be able to teach you some things and walk with you. Once confirmed, you will be full members of this congregation and I hope you don't go anywhere anytime soon, because we need you. We need you in this reformation of our time: to continue to ask the relevant questions, to turn hearts outward, and to share the love and grace of God. Reformed and continuing to reform. May God continue to walk with you and us. Amen.