

Always Reforming: God Hasn't Given Up Yet!

By: Meagan McLaughlin

October 31, 2021. Today's sermon is about how we can be bound up, trapped in familiar ways of doing things, and convinced that the way we see things is the only perspective. We forget that it's not just about us, but about God, our fellow children of God, and the world God created that we are called to care for.

Readings: [Jeremiah 31:31-34](#), [John 8:31-36](#)

*** Transcript ***

Just a few weeks ago, we heard again the story of creation from Genesis. We were reminded that we are created by God, like a potter who molds and shapes the clay with their hands to get just the right unique shape, like a painter who mixes color to get just the right unique shade, who then breathes Spirit into us, giving us life with their very breath. Creator God then invites us into her creative work, to name our fellow creatures, to care for the earth on which all of us are born and live and breathe and work and rest and are fed with food and beauty.

We all know what happens next. We humans forgot we were God's beloved creation, tried to be something else, tried to be God. And God came to find us, reminded us of what we'd forgotten, and for the first time and not the last. With divine compassion, God gave us clothes to cover our shame. God sent us out with work to do, and a promise that the story was not over yet. God had not yet given up on us.

In today's reading from Jeremiah, the relationship between us and the creator continues. The prophet Jeremiah tells us that the God who shapes us and breathes life into us and invites us into creation promises to write the law of love on our hearts. The greatest commandment to love the Lord our God with all our hearts, minds, and strength, and to love our neighbors as ourselves, has been etched into the heart that pumps lifeblood to every cell of our body. God's promise of love for all of us, God's people, and our call to love God and our neighbor, has been coded in our very DNA. God has not yet given up on us.

And we know what happened next. Again, God's people forgot who they were. They forgot that they were intimately connected with the God who created them. They forgot that they were intimately connected with their fellow humans, and the created world around them. They forgot their call to care for creation, to care for one another, especially the most vulnerable among them. And so it goes, for generations.

Some 2000 years ago, we hear in our gospel from John today, Jesus tells his disciples that God has still not given up on us. We will know the truth, Jesus tells his disciples and us, and the truth will set us free. Jesus' disciples protest, claiming they are already free and always have been. Jesus' followers are confused, in that moment not realizing they aren't free yet.

Jesus' reply to his disciples is for us, too: "Everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin." On this Reformation Sunday, it is appropriate to remember that, as our founder Martin Luther taught, we are all both sinners and saints. All of us are God's beloved people, created by God. And at times we, like Adam and Eve and the Israelites, and the disciples, forget that we need God. We get comfortable, and forget what our true relationship with God is. We forget that God has written love, and grace, and trust

on our hearts. We forget we're part of God's larger creation. We are all trapped, Jesus tells us, in our own sin and brokenness.

Fish who have lived in a bowl or an aquarium, when set free in expansive waters, will often stay in a space the size of their former habitat, not realizing that they're free to swim further — perhaps afraid to go beyond the limits they have been accustomed to. At times, we do the same thing, don't we? Just like the fish, we often hold ourselves in captivity.

We are free in one sense, but at a much deeper level, we are all slaves to our own brokenness. We can be bound up, trapped in familiar ways of doing things, convinced that the way we see things is the only perspective. We forget that it's not just about us, but about God, our fellow children of God, and the world God created that we are called to care for. We are trapped by the ways we trust ourselves and forget about God. Like the disciples, we may not even realize it.

Jesus promised the disciples that the truth would set them free. God has not yet given up on us. And 1500 years later, some 500 years ago, Martin Luther spent many years of his life struggling to earn the love of God, prove himself worthy of being called a child of God. Luther found himself trapped, and he could never get there. He finally hit a point of exhaustion, and realized the truth that Jesus was trying to share with his disciples. He was already free, not by his own efforts, but by the grace of God who had formed him out of clay.

The freedom Luther discovered led him to take a stand that had significant consequences, and led to earth-shaking changes in the church over the centuries since. Luther came to know the truth of who he was as a child of God, and sought to bring this freedom to the church he loved.

Luther claimed the freedom of God and called the church to change in the 95 Theses he posted on the doors of the Wittenberg Church, over half a millennium ago. The message he brought was so radical that leaders of his day eventually excommunicated him from the church, and even sought to kill him. We are freed from the legalistic following of the rules *for the sake of the rules* — we will never be perfect. We are freed to be transformed — reformed — by the Spirit of God within us, the law of love that has been written on our hearts. We are freed not to run riot, or sin without consequence, but freed to serve God and neighbor. We are freed to stand on God's promises because we know we can trust God.

500 years later, we are still trapped in our own sin. And that isn't a surprise, really. Even Luther, as he would freely admit, was sinner as well as saint. Alongside the many wonderful things that Luther wrote and taught, we are challenged still today to counter the blatant and unapologetic anti-Semitism that still echoes.

We are still trapped in our own sin. We like things we can depend on, things we can put our hands on, things we can count on, things that endure in a temporal sort of way that we can be comfortable with. We have lost so much of that in the last two years, haven't we? We easily forget the truth of who we are as children of God, and our connectedness and responsibility to God and the rest of creation.

And 500 years later, we are still called to the freedom of God that Jesus proclaimed, and that Luther claimed in the 95 Theses. When we trust God, we can be freed to follow the Spirit to new places, and try new things, like our Holy Experiment with Saturday night Worship, the potential sale of the Mead Center and the renovation of our church building, the exploration of new community partnerships our Christian Service Committee is leading. We welcome old friends and new neighbors, in all the ways we

can. We celebrate the Spirit at work through each one of us, as we follow the Spirit's call to welcome and to serve — and today we especially celebrate the Spirit at work in Jon Heerboth, who this summer completed the Parish Ministry Associate program.

We still don't know where we're going in so many ways, which can be scary sometimes. But we know from our scriptures today that the God who molded, shaped, and breathed life into us is still with us today, writing the law of love on our hearts over and over. No matter how many times we mess up, God provide us with clothes, and food, frees us to be our better selves, and sends us out into creation with work to do and love to share. God still hasn't given up on us yet, and never will.

Thanks be to God.

*** Keywords ***

2021, Christ Lutheran Church, Webster Groves, sermon, podcast, transcript, YouTube, video, Pastor Meagan McLaughlin, Jeremiah 31:31-34, John 8: 31-36