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Festival of the Reformation  
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Grace and Trinity Lutheran Churches, Wichita, KS  
Revelation 14:6-7

*In the Name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit*

Today we celebrate a reformation of the Church—  
a reformation because there's been many more than just the 16<sup>th</sup> century reformation,  
and there'll be more to come.

Have you considered what a reformation is?  
Or what a reformation assumes about the Church?

To *re-form* presumes that whatever was before is dis-formed, or broken.

So for the Church to endure a Re-formation, we must confess that it is broken—  
you don't *re-form* your coffee cup unless you've first dropped it on the floor!

And so to confess the reformation is to confess the brokenness of the Church;  
it's to confess that something isn't working properly,  
that it's become dis-formed, shattered, broken,  
and in need of fixing, *re-forming*.

And to confess that there are *many* reformations,  
is to confess that the church is often broken and often in need of being re-formed.

So, who reforms the Church?  
Who does the fixing and piecing back together?

Sure, today we celebrate St. Martin Luther—a great *re-former* of the Church in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.  
But before him were others,  
others who swept the floor, cleaned the house, and re-formed the broken church.  
Others who prayed for its wholeness and fixing,  
who confessed the truth while surrounded by error.

But even though the many re-formations of the church happened by way of gifted people—  
our reading from revelation today doesn't want us to get caught up in the individual.

To ask "*who* reforms the Church?" is to ask the wrong question—  
that is, unless your answer is Jesus!

In our reading from Revelation today, the re-formation comes from an angel.

And this angel, without a name,  
without anything to draw our attention to *him*,  
points us only toward his word,  
what comes from his mouth;

St. John says,

“Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead,  
with an eternal Gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth,  
to every nation and tribe and language and people.  
And he said with a loud voice,  
‘Fear God and give Him glory,  
because the hour of His judgment has come,  
and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water.’”

This nameless angel, who takes no credit for himself, has only one focus—the *Gospel*.

And this Gospel is the *eternal* Gospel,  
the gospel of *all* times and *all* places for *all* people, forever!  
It’s the message that *all* is finished already; there’s nothing left to do.  
It’s the good news that the brokenness of the world is *re-formed*, fixed, complete.  
It’s the proclamation that the hour of judgment has come—  
God’s wrath and anger and fury have been spent; sin is paid for—done!  
And what makes this so good, so *Gospel*, is that the judgment hasn’t come on you!

*This* is what *re-forms* the Church.

This word of healing and forgiving gives life and form to the broken, shattered, and the dead.  
It’s this Gospel that *re-forms* the broken Church.

So quit trying to re-form the Church on your own.  
Quit trusting in your plans and programs and committees and commissions.

The Church doesn’t grow or live or get put back together by any sort of calculated work.

Her reformation is accomplished only by the angel’s proclamation of the Gospel.  
Nothing else.

We don’t build the Church; Christ builds the Church.  
We don’t re-form the Church; Christ re-forms the Church.

And all of this He does only by His Word, by His Gospel,  
by the preaching that His death on the cross was once and for all,  
for *all* people of *all* times in *all* places...always and everywhere *for you*.

Now what makes this so difficult for us is that we can’t stand to give up control.

We can’t stand to simply pray and preach and hear.  
We want to work.

We want to get our hands dirty.  
We want to show something of progress and growth and success.  
We want to make a name for ourselves and be recognized.

But not today's angel.

Who is this angel? Is it Gabriel? Or Michael? Who cares?!

That's not the point!

It's just the word, just the Gospel—and no credit otherwise.

And we don't know God's plans or ways with this Word—

He does as He pleases with it.

We can't always see whether He's building up or tearing down with this Word.

Sometimes, for the re-formation of the Church, there must be a breaking.

Sometimes, to fix a broken bone, you must break it the right way.

And it hurts.

So also with the Word—

sometimes the Church must be properly broken before it can be re-formed.

And what that means for us is that sometimes, when things seem to be most miserable,

when our suffering seems greatest,

when our numbers decline and the Church seems to be dying,

it may, in fact, be a time of great construction and life!

And the other side of this is that when things seem to be running most smoothly,

when growth seems most evident, and lively, and exciting,

we may, in fact, be dying.

We can't rely or trust in the way things look or feel.

We can't trust in our programs or works or anything of ourselves.

Nothing is proven to work.

No gimmicks, no fads, no exciting new ideas or music or stewardship programs!

Our only trust is this Gospel.

The only thing promised to work is that wherever sins are forgiven,

there is Christ and His work *for us*.

And wherever Christ is,

even in suffering, and death, and weakness, and low Church attendance,

there the Church is also.

Yes, broken—but still Church!

And so we take great comfort in giving up control of the Church.

When we finally stop trying to re-form by our works,

but simply begin to pray, and preach, and hear—

then it's not *we* who build, but *Christ*.

It's not our savy-ness, charisma, or personality—  
it's Christ and Christ alone.

We simply do what we're given to do:  
pray, hear, confess this Christ and witness to Him alone.

Do this, and do it well.

But don't do it with any care of how well it works!  
Don't pay attention to numbers or effectiveness or evidence.

Don't calculate the risks.  
Don't worry about how people will respond.

You won't get any credit. You won't be honored or celebrated or respected.  
But that's not for you anyhow.

The Glory goes to Christ alone.

He builds the Church.  
He *re-forms* the Church.  
And He builds and *re-forms* by His word of forgiveness.

The Church lives only because Christ speaks life into it.

He says to the broken and weak and dying,  
“Live! Your sins are forgiven! They can't hurt you anymore!”

And then, to build and re-form even more,  
He puts that word into your mouth.  
He feeds the broken and hungry and dead with life!

Sure, it doesn't seem like words, bread, and wine will be a very effective program for growth—  
and yet these are the things that have Christ's own promise attached!

These are the instruments and vessels and masks of God Himself re-forming the Church!  
These are what bind up the broken, heal the sick, and give life to the dead.

So that's what we'll do.

We'll be like the angel—nameless, faceless, creditless—  
but we'll have an eternal Gospel to proclaim:  
“The hour of judgment has come to this Christ—  
He died and lives *for you!*”

That's re-formation!

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