

Reformation Roosters
Romans 3:19-28
23rd Sunday After Pentecost
October 28, 2018 – Reformation Sunday
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Romans 3:19-28 (NRSV)

¹⁹ Now we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. ²⁰ For “no human being will be justified in his sight” by deeds prescribed by the law, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin. **Righteousness through Faith** ²¹ But now, apart from law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, ²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ^[a] for all who believe. For there is no distinction, ²³ since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; ²⁴ they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement^[b] by his blood, effective through faith. He did this to show his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed; ²⁶ it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies the one who has faith in Jesus.^[c] ²⁷ Then what becomes of boasting? It is excluded. By what law? By that of works? No, but by the law of faith. ²⁸ For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law.

Roosters, at least in art, depict courage, strength, and pride.
You could even say: honesty, vigilance and watchfulness.
All excellent qualities, yes?

The Bible mentions roosters about 12 times (depending on your translation) mostly in the gospel tellings of Peter’s denial of Christ on the night Jesus was arrested.

We know Jesus’ death, brutal as it was, *WAS* God’s intention, the reason that Jesus was born.

So, while the rooster *could* symbolize betrayal and death, and is connected to that purpose...it can also lead to Christ’s RESURRECTION!

A rooster symbolizes, at least to me, the dawning of a new day.

I stretch a little and think: the same rooster that crowed three times and sent Peter into miserable guilt....could also have crowed, early in the morning a few days later, maybe even awakening Mary to get her going to the garden tomb.

THAT was a new day to crow about!

While Gene and I were in Europe, we learned that historically, Protestant churches placed roosters on top of their steeples to distinguish them from Catholic churches.

And protestant churches came about because of the Reformation of the 1500's.

Today we remember Reformation Sunday, but WHAT is THAT?

Well, here's your money's worth after my time at school this summer.

On October 31, 1517 a monk, who was also a professor of theology, named Martin Luther nailed 95 ideas (they're called the 95 Theses) to the door of the Wittenberg, Germany chapel.

With the sound of that hammer pounding, a revolution that changed the world started.

It was a revolution of returning to God's word...

...to a proper understanding of God's grace...

...AND to beginning to see God among humanity once again.

Reading tomes about the event, I stretched again and thought about the heart-rending, impact of the SOUND of a hammer pounding – in Wittenberg...or on Golgatha. And the revolution of both places.

But, let's stick to 1517.

The implications STILL impact us 501 years later.

We're not Lutheran, but Martin Luther's stand against false leadership and false teachings in the church of HIS day is something we are a part of.

Another interesting parallel, huh?

Galilee heard about false leadership and teachings **2000 plus** years ago, too.

In addition to the false teachings, Luther's protest brought about getting the Bible into the hands of the common people IN THEIR OWN LANGUAGE.

- Society was changed when someone finally challenged the Pope and the church.
- People were educated and they, in turn, could teach others.

Bottom line though, we need to remember the main point of the Reformation which wasn't about sociology or education.

The Reformation was about returning to the **freedom** given to us through the Gospel.

It's still about THAT.

Thesis #62 said, *"The true treasure of the Church is the Most Holy Gospel of the glory and the grace of God."*

Martin Luther was this young man who was set to please his dad and go to law school.

And then he wasn't.

Much to dad's dismay, Martin says "I wanna become a monk."

And he did. He studied hard *and that's where the trouble began.*

Not malicious troubles but, as Martin learned more, he also discovered how much was missing AND how much sin he had in his life.

When he studied the first two verses of today's reading, he would've known what they meant. He probably also applied a big dose of condemnation to himself.

The Law of God was clear to Martin.

The problem was that no one was teaching what the Bible actually teaches about how to find peace and freedom in Christ.

So the more he learned, the more he tried to fix the problem of sin on his own. He didn't "just" confess, Martin would sit in the confessional for hours trying to recall every single thing that he did which fell short.

Even for the best of us, that's impossible!

He abused himself, whipping himself...

...or lay out in the snow all night without a blanket.

And with every action, trying to please God, Martin realized: "This is foolish" and would fall deeper into despair.

When he hit rock bottom, he got angry.

"How could God set up such strict rules, knowing full well we'll never be able to satisfy Him?"

Thank goodness, Martin continued to study.

And God made something click for him.

When Martin read the first verse of Psalm 51, he began see that there was another side to God. That verse says:

*"Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing **love**; according to your great **compassion** blot out my transgressions."*

Click! And ah-ha! God **does have** standards (that we can't reach on our own.)

But God is ALSO the answer to our sins.

Luther's "ah-ha moment" was rediscovering the central message of the Bible:

God loves and forgives His people, and God gives us (all us poor miserable sinners) righteousness as our hope and security.

Luther had gone through quite a lot ON HIS OWN to "get to God."

But, he still had doubts and recognized there was still a long way to go.

But the Gospel message changed him.

God would come to him!

...with salvation, not as a prize, but as a gift.

God would actually GIVE him righteousness and forgiveness and promised eternal life.

Can you imagine how much that changes everything.
The established church wouldn't ever be the same.

That's what WE celebrate on Reformation Sunday!
That every time we worship we celebrate that WE ARE CHANGED, but not by anything we have done or can do!

We have the truth, not just about God's Law and our sinfulness and a perceived anger of a just and holy God.
We ALSO have the truth that GOD IS the answer to our sinfulness.

Are you crowing yet?

God sent Christ to be, as Romans says, the "propitiation," (big bible-y word) the substitute and sacrifice for our sins.
That God loves us, destroys our sins with that Sacrifice, and replaces those sins (and God's punishment) with Christ's purity, holiness, and eternal unwavering love.

The words David read for us earlier spells this out so beautifully:
*"But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, ...the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ is for all who believe. For there is no distinction: all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, **and** are justified by his grace as a gift, ...to be received by faith."*

THAT'S is the focus of the Reformation.
It's the focus of the Word of God.

IT IS the GOSPEL!

We've all sinned against God and the Law is clear that we should get God's eternal punishment.

BUT GOD has given us the GIFT OF grace.
We didn't do anything, except as it says in Romans, "receive it by faith!"

THAT, DEAR ONES, IS REAL FREEDOM!

That's what Martin Luther was adamant that people should know about!

That's what he wanted to let others LEARN and teach others about; it's why he had to get the Bible translated and into OUR hands

The work of the Reformation continues in us when we have our own "ah-ha" moments of recognizing, like Peter did when he heard that rooster crow, that we **are** betrayers and sinners.

Our Reformation work is to share with others what we've learned, what we're continuing to learn this side of Heaven, that "we were going the wrong way but we can be changed."

It's a message of freedom – something to CROW about!

The freedom in God's grace is so different from anything else in the world. It has power like nothing else in the world.

It's easy to get lost in trying to fight our battles on our own like Luther tried.

It's easy to try and set ourselves free;

- to think about how to get back in to God's good graces,
- to think of ourselves more highly than we should,
- to treat God like there's a spigot to get what we need when we need him, but neglecting to realize how desperately we need him.

It's all too easy to try and think of ways to get God to notice us and love us.

BUT IT'S ALREADY ACCOMPLISHED!

God's Son set us free from sin by paying the price in full.

We're not only noticed, we're loved completely.

The Reformation message is simple.

It's not about us.

It's all about Jesus.

I read something recently that, when I stretched again, I thought painted a picture of the message of the Reformation.

The article was about trapeze artists.

Imagine this with me:

Imagine that you're going out on the flying trapeze to do stunts with a partner.

You climb up, 50 feet in the air, to the platform where you grab the trapeze bar and with a deep breath you swing out forcefully

You can feel the breeze hit your face as you swing high above the ground.

On the backswing you can't help but look down and remember, "hey, there's no net down there!"

But, with another deep breath you swing forward, and as your bar reaches top of the swing...you let go and see your partner waiting for you, upside down, knees tightly clenched around their trapeze, arms outstretched.

You have only one thing left to do AND IT'S VERY IMPORTANT.

If you do it you'll live.

If you don't, you'll fall and die.

Do you know what to do?

The answer is surprisingly simple. You have to let your partner grab a hold of you.

But it isn't so simple.

It's hard to trust someone else that much.

It's hard to be at peace with your inability to help yourself.

It's hard to admit that you can't save yourself, but that someone else has to do it for you.

YOU HAVE TO LET THEM CATCH YOU!

If **you** reach out and try to make a connection happen, if you're the one grabbing first as you try to save yourself from falling, the connection will be impossible and you will die.

BUT, if they catch you, you will be fine.

Isn't that a great illustration of God's way of dealing with us.

We can't save ourselves.

We can't grab a hold of God or trust our own abilities.

We have to hear the rooster crow; be awakened to saying yes, BY FAITH, and rely on God to catch us, save us, to hold onto us.

That's what we celebrate on Reformation Sunday, actually every day.

It's exactly what God has done for us in Jesus Christ.

He's caught us, and will not let go.

He's forgiven us, and won't turn away.

He's promised us the Kingdom of Heaven, and won't back down.

We can thank God for using Luther to start a Reformation of returning people to the Good News of Christ's love.

We can also thank God that this reformation impacts us today.

It's at the root of who we are, and why we exist as a church, to continue to share with people who are slaves to darkness, that the Son of God calls them to experience the same joy and freedom that Luther experienced, and that we experience as well.

Maybe today can be, for us, our own *reformation*.

Can't hurt, can it?

To hear *symbolically*, a rooster's reminder crow.

To pound out our own thesis that we need to return to what God says, and does, and reveals to us in His Word.

There is a lot we can say today.

But the most important thing is what Christ tells the gospel of John,

“So if the Son set you free, you will be free indeed.”

AMEN