

## Reformation Sunday 2022

Today, Lutherans the world over will join together in celebrating the Reformation. But what does that even mean, celebrate the Reformation? What are we celebrating? Are we celebrating a man? An event? A period of history? I suppose many different answers could be given to these questions, but here's what the Reformation means to me—Courage. Pure, undiluted courage. Because that's what it took for Luther to stand against tyranny. To stand against the established church of his day and say "NO!" to the abuses he perceived all around him. And he did it without any regard for his life or his future. He did it for no other reason than it was the right thing to do. No matter how you look at it, it took courage to do what he did. And courage like that is always worth celebrating because it's rare. Too often we encounter the opposite in this world. The world is full of cowards. Those who are too afraid to speak, to act, to do what needs to be done to protect virtue and truth. The path being too hard, the mountain too steep, the cost too high, the sacrifice too great. Immobilized by fear, controlled by the what-ifs of life, we flow along with the current not wanting to make waves. We want to be liked so we are silent before our peers. We worry about the look of things. How we will be perceived. The long-term consequences. We hide behind our good intentions, our noble sounding nonsense like "I have a job to keep, a living to make, bills to pay". I can't afford to risk what I have achieved. I have too much to lose. And so, what do we do? We keep our mouths shut and our social positions secure all the while the world burns around us. Being cowardly is more than a character flaw. It's rooted in that most ancient of sins where life is someone else's fault, someone else's responsibility. Cowardice is satanic because after all Satan himself is a coward; he is the path of least resistance, the easy choice, the excuse made in the moment; the victim of circumstance.

God on the other hand is raw courage. Reflecting Him, the Church is supposed to be courageous too. But what happens when the Church second guesses herself? What does the Church look like when she has lost her confidence? Well, then her message is altogether different. She no longer sings the bass of the martyrs, the chorus of the church militant marching as to war. She softens her image; she tones down her rhetoric. She appeals to human decency and goodness. She adopts catchwords like 'alternative fact' or 'repression' or 'inclusiveness'. Her message is trendy, full of anxiety, it sounds political, more satire than sacred. This makes her soft and flabby, but popular. She finds a new audience that loves her pandering, that loves to hear there's only what's right for

you, and that is for you alone to decide. We know where Luther stood. But where do we stand? Does our indifference disguise our fear to take a stand, to commit ourselves wholeheartedly to God. I believe it does. We lack courage because we lack conviction. If the Church can be compared to a body what Luther gave back to the Church was a backbone. He was not the first person to do this in the long history of the Church, and let us pray he will not be the last. In Luther's day, the Church had lost sight of the clear teachings of God. She added to God's Word; she spoke where God had not spoken, she bound where God had released, and released where God had bound. She forfeited her most cherished teachings of forgiveness and freedom for a mess of worldly porridge. Luther never intended to change the Church only restore her by reminding her of her true identity. He taught there is a right to be pursued and a wrong to be avoided, but it is God alone who defines both. There is one truth of Christ and the rest is falsehood, there is sin and we dare not stop calling a sin a sin. It is the Church's responsibility to identify the line that separates the two and then lead others by example in the way of all truth. Our culture today prides itself on such things as open-mindedness. But in the words of G.K. Chesterton, "Merely having an open mind is nothing. The object of opening the mind, like opening the mouth, is to shut it again on something solid".

This is the foundation of Lutheranism, this is our heritage, and it is a heritage worth fighting for, worth dying for. And yes, our foundation really is the legacy of one man. We shouldn't be ashamed of that. We should pledge our allegiance to Him, put our faith in Him, and trust in Him above all others. But this one man isn't Luther, it's Christ. And if we make our stand with Christ, not even the gates of hell can prevail against us. The Church's one message is this: Be bold. Be brave. Get out there with some godly passion. For it is Christ or it is nothing. And if we believe this then we should live like nothing else matters. For to live any other way is to be dead already. So, let this world do its worst, let it take everything from us, for though it all be gone the victory is still ours, the kingdom ours remains. This is our Reformation. We will fear not the foe; we will give not one inch of ground; we will not be cowards. On this day we commit ourselves again to Christ, we pledge once more not to trade the truth of Christ for the falsehoods of men. Here we make our stand, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, and we can do no other. This was Luther's conviction, and may it be ours. Amen.

In Christ,

Pastor Jeremy Mills