

Reformation Day Chapel 2005

10:00

Kurt C. Schaefer

Prelude: *A Mighty Fortress*

Greeting and Introduction:

Sisters and Brothers in the Lord Jesus: The Lord be with you. *And also with you.*

Please pray with me:

We begin our worship in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

My Heavenly Father, I thank You, through Jesus Christ, Your beloved Son, that You kept me safe from all evil and danger last night. And I pray that you would save me today as well, from every evil and sin, so that all I do and the way that I live will please you. I put myself in your care, body and soul and all that I have. Let Your holy Angels be with me, so that the evil enemy will not gain power over me. Amen. (Luther's morning prayer)

Martin Luther

Today we observe the Festival of Reformation Day, a day on which all Christian of all eras and traditions are called to observe with wonder the constant work of the Holy Spirit in calling God's people forward out of unbelief and rebellion, into the glorious light of the gospel.

Why celebrate that perpetual work on October 31? Because on this date, 488 years ago this morning, a series of events began to unfold that brought the Holy Spirit's constant work into particular focus.

On the morning of October 31, a 33-year-old college professor awoke, dressed, and had devotions. We just prayed his daily first prayer of the morning. He went off to teach his morning lecture. For most of his adult life he had been tormented by a question:

How can a holy, just God accept a sinful person like me? It's a question every morally serious person eventually faces. Hear the words of Psalm 71, which the Holy Spirit had begun to use several years earlier to unlock the treasury of the Bible's answer to our predicament:

¹ **In you, O LORD, I have taken refuge;
let me never be put to shame.**

² **Rescue me and deliver me in your righteousness;
turn your ear to me and save me.**

³ **Be my rock of refuge,
to which I can always go;
give the command to save me,
for you are my rock and my fortress.**

⁴ Deliver me, O my God, from the hand of the wicked,
from the grasp of evil and cruel men.

⁵ For you have been my hope, O Sovereign LORD,
my confidence since my youth.

⁶ From birth I have relied on you;
you brought me forth from my mother's womb.
I will ever praise you.

⁷ I have become like a portent to many,
but you are my strong refuge.

The morning lecture of October 31, 1517 found our young professor teaching from the book of Galatians. Consider Chapter Three:

¹**You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?** Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. ²I would like to learn just one thing from you: **Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard?** ³Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? ⁴Have you suffered so much for nothing—if it really was for nothing? ⁵Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?

⁶Consider Abraham: "He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."^[a] ⁷Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. ⁸The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you."^[b] ⁹So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

¹⁰All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law."^[c] ¹¹**Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, "The righteous will live by faith."**^[d] ¹²The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, "The man who does these things will live by them."^[e] ¹³Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree."^[f] ¹⁴He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.

The professor became so caught up in that morning's ideas that by evening he had penned 95 debating points, questioning the religious practices of his day, and hung them on the college bulletin board. Martin Luther did not intend to change the world that day, but the Holy Spirit did.

The single most powerful song expressing the ideas of the Reformation was Luther's own *A Mighty Fortress*. For the prelude you heard a setting that is more faithful to Luther's lute playing than the version with which you may have grown up, which we will now sing together. Please open your *Psalter Hymnal* to #469 with me.

Hymn: *A Mighty Fortress*, PH 469

1 A mighty fortress is our God,
a bulwark never failing;
our helper he, amid the flood
of mortal ills prevailing.
For still our ancient foe
does seek to work us woe;
his craft and power are great,
and armed with cruel hate,
on earth is not his equal.

2 Did we in our own strength confide,
our striving would be losing,
were not the right Man on our side,
the Man of God's own choosing.
You ask who that may be?
Christ Jesus, it is he;
Lord Sabaoth his name,
from age to age the same;
and he must win the battle.

3 And though this world, with devils filled,
should threaten to undo us,
we will not fear, for God has willed
his truth to triumph through us.
The prince of darkness grim,
we tremble not for him;
his rage we can endure,
for lo! his doom is sure;
one little word shall fell him.

4 That Word above all earthly powers
no thanks to them abideth;
the Spirit and the gifts are ours
through him who with us sideth.
Let goods and kindred go,
this mortal life also;
the body they may kill:
God's truth abideth still;
his kingdom is forever!

John Calvin

The core ideas of the Reformation are sometimes expressed in four Latin phrases: *sola scriptura*, *sola gratia*, *sola fide*, *sola Christo*. In English: The Holy Spirit is always calling the Church to hear His voice in the Scriptures, and to acknowledge that we are saved at God's initiative by grace through faith, not because of what we do but because of what the Lord Jesus has already done for us.

By the age of 24 John Calvin had accepted these ideas of the Reformation, and within two years he was forced to flee as a refugee to Switzerland. He had been born

eight years before Luther's theses were written, and had studied in France for the priesthood and then for a career in law. At age 27 he wrote a treatise on behalf of the persecuted believers of France—his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, a lucid, systematic expression of the Reformation's ideas. There followed a long development of Geneva as an intellectual center for the reformation, a place of refuge for harassed believers, and a home of renewal in Christian worship. Central to that renewal was the Genevan Psalter, with musical settings for the Bible's own songbook. Today we will sing Psalm 68, using music from the 1539 Genevan Psalter as harmonized by our won Howard Slenk. Please turn with me to *Psalter Hymnal* # 68.

Psalm: *Let God Arise*, Psalm 68, vs. 1, 2, 9

Let God arise and by His might put all His enemies to flight
with shame and consternation.
For when the LORD God shall appear, He will consume, afar and near,
with fire and desolation.
As smoke before His dreadful ire, as wax is molten by the fire,
so shall the wicked perish.
But let the righteous, blest of old, joy in their God and now behold
the victory they cherish.

Exalt, exalt the name of God! Sing, sing His royal fame abroad
with fervent exaltation.
Cast up a highway smooth and wide, that through the deserts He may ride;
the LORD is our salvation.
God's mighty power sets prisoners free; His arm of strength gains victory,
to rebels shows no pity.
The father of the fatherless and help for widows in distress
is God in Zion's city.

All nations of the earth, exult, raise psalms of praise to heaven's vault,
God's ancient throne and dwelling.
God rides His chariot in the height, He thunders forth His royal right;
God reigns, all kings excelling.
Proclaim the awesome power of God, make known His mighty deeds abroad;
all Israel shall extol Him.
For He is powerful and great: all earth and skies are His estate;
His majesty excels them.

John and Charles Wesley

The need for reformation is not limited to any one region or era. John and Charles Wesley were born 200 years after Luther and Calvin, in Epworth England—their parents' 15th and 18th children. Theirs was a pious family. Both were educated in Oxford, ordained ministers, and traveled as missionaries to Georgia. Yet after all this John and Charles were missing many elements of personal faith. (Sound familiar?) John, for example, had an adult profession of faith at age 34, after feeling his heart “strangely warmed” at about 8:45 p.m. on May 24, 1738, during a London meeting while listening to a reading of Luther’s preface to Romans.

When the Wesley’s revival movement was opposed by the organized church, they began preaching in fields and anywhere else common people could come to listen. Charles wrote over 6000 hymns—hymns meant not only to inspire, but also to instruct in the great truths of Scripture. Among them are *O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing*, *Hark the Herald Angels Sing*, and *Christ the Lord is Risen Today*. Today we sing a Wesley hymn written in the year of John’s personal revival, *And Can It Be*.

Hymn: *And Can It Be*, PH 267

1 And can it be that I should gain
an interest in the Savior's blood?
Died he for me, who caused his pain
for me, who caused his bitter death?
Amazing love! How can it be
that you, my Lord, should die for me?

Refrain:

Amazing love! How can it be
that you, my Lord, should die for me?

2 He left his Father's throne above
so free, so infinite his grace
emptied himself of all but love,
and bled for Adam's helpless race!
What mercy this, immense and free,
for, O my God, it found out me! Refrain

3 Long my imprisoned spirit lay
fast bound in sin and nature's night.
Your sunrise turned that night to day;
I woke the dungeon flamed with light!
My chains fell off, your voice I knew;
I rose, went out, and followed you.
Refrain

4 No condemnation now I dread,
for Christ, and all in him, is mine!
Alive in him, my living Head,
and clothed in righteousness divine,
bold I approach the eternal throne
and claim the crown, through Christ, my
own. Refrain

Parting Words: Luther's Prayer of Confession

We close with a prayer for renewal by Martin Luther:

Behold, Lord

**An empty vessel that needs
to be filled.**

My Lord, fill it

I am weak in faith;

Strengthen me.

I am cold in love;

Warm me and make me fervent,

That my love may go out

to my neighbor...

I do not have a strong and firm faith;

at times I doubt and am unable to trust thee altogether.

O Lord, help me.

Strengthen my faith and

trust in you...

In you I have sealed the treasures of all I have.

I am poor; you are rich and came to be merciful to the poor.

I am a sinner; you are upright.

With me, there is an

abundance of sin;

In You is the fullness of

righteousness.

Therefore I will remain

with You,

You whom I can receive,

But to Whom I may not give.

Amen.

Go in peace.