

I'm going to do something I've never tried before, and that is to talk about The Muppets at the beginning of a Reformation sermon. Believe it or not, it was all the way back in 1970 that the world first heard Kermit the Frog sing a song called, “It's Not Easy Being Green.” The only reason I bring that up this morning is that it parallels my introductory point: it's not easy being Lutheran. And when I say that, here's what I mean.

Lutherans are often thought of as the proto-Protestants, the first ones. And by definition, it's right in the name, a Protestant is someone who protests, and to protest means that we are against something. And to be sure, Protestants were and are against certain things, some of which we'll be talking about today, but right here is where it becomes not so easy to be Lutheran. Because, true Christianity is not a matter of what we are against, but of what we believe.

See, the problem is, being against something never keeps people together for too long. After World War II, one-time allies became enemies. If your movement, whatever that movement is about, is predicated on being against things, then once you've got one thing straightened out, you have to find something else to rail against, which tends to divide, not unify. The Lutheran Reformation requires vigilance, but it cannot simply be defined as an opposition movement. It needs a better reason to exist. And thanks be to God, it has one.

On each anniversary of the Reformation, it's important that we remember Luther's protest against the selling of the forgiveness of sins for money. It all started with the pope's need to raise money to finish the construction of Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome, which is still the largest church in Europe. Luther's 95 Theses put the whole project on hold. He did not like the idea that people could buy their way out of hell and purgatory. The great reformer did not teach that forgiveness was free, however. A price had been paid by God who gave us everything in offering up his Son Jesus in death. Luther's complaint was not about beautiful churches. His 95 assertions nailed to the Wittenberg church door simply said that money cannot buy anyone's way into heaven. No money, no philosophy, no human effort can take the place of Jesus Christ.

Reformation Sunday must be more than an institutionalized revolution intended to re-live old battles and refight old wars. Living in the past, even Luther's past, makes no one a Lutheran. It is far more important for us to come together to affirm that Jesus Christ is the center of everything we do and say. We are pro-baptism because it is there that Jesus makes us participants in his death and resurrection. The Lord's Supper is at the center of our worship experience of God because Jesus is the center of our worship experience. Everything in our Lutheran Christian faith has its focus on Jesus. Simply put, Christianity is expressed in the content of the Apostles Creed. If that seems too narrow a definition for Luther's Reformation, then let's go to the Catechism. Next to the Creed place the 10 Commandments, the Lord's Prayer, Baptism, Confession (leading to the forgiveness of sins), and the Lord's Supper. Just thinking and praying about those things will keep every Christian busy until Christ returns in glory. Now don't misunderstand, I'm not promoting the Catechism because Luther wrote it. I'm promoting the

Catechism because in it I find Jesus who grabs me by the shoulders and by his cross and takes me to God his Father.

An author named Marc Leinhart entitled his book about what Luther believed, “Luther: Witness to Jesus Christ.” That really says it all. His Reformation was more than a repetition of slogans or rearranging the church furniture. His Reformation was about Jesus. You can have the Bible and even biblical principles, but if you do not find Jesus there, it’s a ‘swing and a miss.’ Whatever there is to learn and know about God is found in Jesus. The person without Christ has nothing. The person who has Christ has everything. The heart of Luther’s Reformation is getting out of the way of this Savior and letting him save.

That only happens when we let the Word of God speak, and when we let the Word of God have the final say. And so, like Martin Luther, we let the Word speak, in passages like Romans 3, which says, “...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Did you hear it? All have sinned. I assure you, “all” means “all.” This is incredibly offensive to the human ego. Because “all” includes my saintly grandmother, and beautiful little children, and everyone you’ve ever admired. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and therefore God would be justified in punishing their sin right now and also forever. Oh, and I almost forgot, “All” includes you and it includes me. So what are we going to do? Get out of the way of the Savior and let Him save.

There’s another “all” in Romans 3. Listen for it. “The righteousness of God has been shown...the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.” Once again, I assure you, “all” means “all.” God’s righteousness, the perfect record of Jesus, is credited to all who believe He has done it. Forgiveness of sins and every blessing is received by faith, by all with faith in Jesus. The person who believes this receives this. They have it now. It’s a gift. The Savior is saving. That’s what we are for. The church is nothing more or less than people whom the Savior has saved; people who see themselves in both “alls”—“all have sinned”—that’s me—and “right with God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.” Also me.

Like I said, it’s not easy being Lutheran. Why? Because we do have to speak against all the other answers to the question, “So what are we going to do now?” The church of Luther’s day would have said, “Believe in God and work as hard as you can to prove it. If you’re not sure if you’re doing enough, do more.” We have to speak against it. Today, the world gives all kinds of wild answers, including, “There is no such thing as sin, so don’t even worry about it,” even as the world giving that advice is on fire. We have to speak against it. But we’re not just *against* things to be contrary, stubborn people; we have to say what things are not so that we can say what things are. So yes, we are against sin, against evil, against death, against the devil, against the rejection of God. But what we are *for* is so much more beautiful, so much more hopeful, so much more life-giving. Our greatest need has been answered in Jesus, the Son of God. We are for people getting to know Him, trusting and believing in Him and loving Him as they have been loved by Him. We are for people serving others with a heart full of thanks to Jesus. We are for getting the message of Jesus’ cross and empty tomb right and getting it out where lives can be changed. It’s not easy, but there’s nothing more meaningful than being for the crucified and risen Christ.