

27th October

23rd Sunday after Pentecost

Reformation Sunday

2Kings.23.1-9
Psalm 81.1-14
Romans 11.1-6
Luke 11.33-end

Key Verse: Luke 11:33 – “No one lights a lamp and hides it in a clay jar or puts it under a bed. Instead, they put it on a stand so that those who come in can see the light.”

Beloved brothers and sisters in Christ, as we gather on this Reformation Sunday, we reflect on the profound impact of the Reformation on our faith and church. This day invites us to remember the historical events that ignited a movement of renewal and change in the Church, encouraging us to examine our own lives and faith in the light of God’s Word. The Reformation was not merely a historical event but a transformative moment that emphasized the core tenets of our faith: grace, Scripture, faith, and the priesthood of all believers. As we explore our readings today, we will uncover themes of restoration, the importance of obedience to God, and the call to shine our light in a world that often prefers darkness. Our scriptural journey takes us from the reforms of King Josiah to Paul’s reflections on God’s faithfulness, concluding with Jesus’ teaching about the light within us. Let us open our hearts and minds to the truths that God has for us today.

I. The Restoration of Worship (2 Kings 23:1-9)

Our first reading takes us to the reign of King Josiah, a young king who sought to restore true worship in Israel. In a time when the people had turned to idol worship and abandoned the ways of the Lord, Josiah took bold steps to cleanse the temple and restore proper worship. In verses 1-3, we see Josiah gathering the people to hear the Book of the Law, which had been rediscovered in the temple. Upon hearing the words of the Lord, Josiah is deeply moved. He tears his clothes in repentance, recognizing the gravity of the nation’s sins. His response is a testament to the importance of God’s Word in guiding us back to Him. Josiah’s reforms included destroying the altars to foreign gods and reinstating the Passover, a critical event in Israel’s history that reminded the people of their deliverance from slavery. His actions reflect a deep desire for authentic worship, aligning the nation with God’s commandments. In our own lives, we are often called to evaluate what we have allowed to take precedence over our worship of God. Are there distractions or idols that have crept into our lives, diverting our attention from our relationship with Him? Just as Josiah led his people back to true worship, we too are invited to examine our hearts and seek restoration. Consider a modern example: a church that found itself

struggling with dwindling attendance and a sense of apathy among its members. After prayer and reflection, the leadership recognized the need for renewed focus on worship and community. They began a series of initiatives emphasizing prayer, Scripture reading, and service to the community. Over time, they witnessed a revitalization in attendance and spiritual fervour. As we reflect on Josiah's reforms, let us ask ourselves: What steps can we take to restore authentic worship in our lives and communities? How can we align ourselves with God's Word and ensure that our worship is genuine and reflective of our faith?

II. The Call to Listen and Obey (Psalm 81:1-14)

Psalm 81 is a poignant reminder of God's desire for His people to listen and obey. The psalmist begins with a call to worship: "Sing for joy to God our strength; shout aloud to the God of Jacob!" (v. 1). This call to worship sets the tone for the reflection on God's faithfulness and the people's response. In verses 8-10, God speaks directly to His people, urging them to listen: "Hear, O my people, and I will warn you - if you would but listen to me, O Israel! You shall have no foreign god among you." God's desire is clear—He longs for His people to turn away from the distractions and false gods that lead them astray. The psalm highlights the consequences of disobedience. When the people failed to listen and follow God's commandments, they experienced the repercussions of their choices. God's desire is not for punishment but for relationship—a relationship built on trust, obedience, and love. In our contemporary context, how often do we find ourselves distracted by the noise of the world? In our pursuit of success, comfort, and validation, do we overlook the gentle promptings of the Holy Spirit? The call of the psalmist is relevant today, urging us to pause and listen to God's voice amid the chaos. Reflecting on a personal story, consider a time when a woman felt overwhelmed by her responsibilities at work and home. Despite her busyness, she sensed God urging her to slow down and spend time in prayer and Scripture. Reluctantly, she heeded the call and found renewal in her spirit and clarity in her priorities. As we reflect on Psalm 81, may we cultivate a heart that is receptive to God's voice, allowing His words to guide our decisions and shape our lives.

III. The Faithfulness of God (Romans 11:1-6)

In Romans 11, Paul grapples with the tension between God's faithfulness and the apparent rejection of the Gospel by many of His people, Israel. He poses the question: "Did God reject His people? By no means!" (v. 1). Paul highlights that God's faithfulness remains intact despite human unfaithfulness. Using the example of Elijah, who felt alone in his faithfulness, Paul assures us that God always preserves a remnant. Even in difficult times, God is at work, drawing His people back to Himself. In verses 5-6, Paul emphasizes that it is by grace that we are saved, not by our works. This grace is a gift from God, reminding us that our standing before Him is not based on our performance but on His unchanging love. As we reflect on God's faithfulness, we are called to trust in His promises. The Reformation sought to remind the Church of this grace and to reject any notion that our salvation could be earned through human

effort. It invites us to embrace the truth that we are fully accepted by God through Christ. Consider the story of a man who struggled with feelings of unworthiness, believing he had to earn God's love. After much reflection and study, he realized that his worth was not determined by his actions but by God's grace. This revelation transformed his relationship with God, leading him to live out of gratitude rather than fear. As we embrace the truth of God's faithfulness in our lives, may we respond with gratitude, allowing His grace to shape our actions and attitudes.

IV. The Light Within Us (Luke 11:33-36)

In our Gospel reading, Jesus teaches about the importance of being a light in the world. He states in verse 33, "No one lights a lamp and hides it in a clay jar or puts it under a bed. Instead, they put it on a stand so that those who come in can see the light." Jesus emphasizes that our lives should reflect His light, illuminating the darkness around us. As believers, we are called to shine brightly in a world often marked by despair, division, and confusion. The light within us is a testament to God's grace and truth, and it should not be hidden. In verses 34-36, Jesus connects our spiritual sight to the light we possess. If our eyes are healthy and focused on Him, our whole being will be filled with light. However, if we allow distractions or sin to cloud our vision, we risk living in darkness. This call to be a light is a powerful reminder of our role in the world. We are not merely passive observers but active participants in God's mission. As we engage with our communities, we must reflect Christ's love, justice, and truth in our actions and words. Reflect on a time when you witnessed someone shining their light in a difficult situation. Perhaps it was a neighbour who offered help to those in need, or a friend who spoke words of encouragement to someone struggling. These acts of light can have a profound impact, drawing others to the hope found in Christ. As we embrace our calling to be lights in the world, let us commit to shining brightly, allowing God's love to flow through us and reach those around us.

Here's a brief overview of Martin Luther and other key figures in the Reformation that you can incorporate into your sermon on Reformation Sunday.

Martin Luther: The Catalyst of the Reformation

Martin Luther (1483-1546) was a German theologian, monk, and professor who is widely regarded as the catalyst for the Protestant Reformation. His journey toward reform began in earnest when he struggled with the idea of salvation and the church's practices. Luther was particularly troubled by the sale of indulgences - payments made to the Church to reduce punishment for sins. In 1517, he famously nailed his Ninety-Five Theses to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, challenging the Church's authority and advocating for a return to biblical teachings.

Luther emphasized the principles of *sola fide* (faith alone), *sola gratia* (grace alone), and *sola scriptura* (Scripture alone). He argued that salvation is a gift from God received through faith, not a result of human works. His translations of the Bible into German made the Scriptures accessible to the common people, encouraging

individuals to read and interpret the Bible for themselves. Luther's actions not only led to his excommunication but also sparked a movement that would change the landscape of Christianity forever.

As we reflect on Reformation Sunday, we honour not only Martin Luther but also a host of faithful men and women who sought to return the Church to its biblical foundations. Figures like John Calvin, Huldrych Zwingli, William Tyndale, John Knox, and even Desiderius Erasmus played crucial roles in this transformative movement. Each of these individuals, inspired by their conviction of God's truth, took significant risks to stand against the tide of tradition that had drifted from Scripture. Their collective efforts remind us that the journey of faith is not a solitary path but one enriched by the contributions of those who have gone before us. Just as they illuminated the truths of God's Word in their time, we are called to carry that light forward into our own context. Luther's boldness in challenging the established norms of the Church serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of standing firm in one's convictions and the transformative power of God's Word.

Other Key Figures in the Reformation

1. **John Calvin (1509-1564):** A French theologian and pastor, Calvin was instrumental in the development of Reformed theology. His work, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, outlined his understanding of Christian doctrine and emphasized the sovereignty of God, the authority of Scripture, and the necessity of grace. Calvin's ideas influenced many Protestant communities, particularly in Switzerland and beyond.
2. **Huldrych Zwingli (1484-1531):** A contemporary of Luther, Zwingli was a leader of the Reformation in Switzerland. He advocated for a return to the Scriptures and rejected many of the Church's traditions that he deemed unbiblical. Zwingli's emphasis on the authority of Scripture and his interpretation of the Eucharist were foundational to the development of Reformed thought.
3. **William Tyndale (1494-1536):** An English scholar and translator, Tyndale is best known for his translation of the New Testament into English, which was the first to be printed. His work laid the groundwork for subsequent English translations, including the King James Version. Tyndale was martyred for his efforts, but his translations helped to democratize the reading of Scripture and promote the Reformation in England.
4. **John Knox (1514-1572):** A Scottish minister and theologian, Knox was a leading figure in the Scottish Reformation. He established the Presbyterian Church in Scotland and advocated for reforms that emphasized the authority of Scripture and the priesthood of all believers. Knox's writings and leadership played a significant role in shaping the religious landscape of Scotland.
5. **Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536):** While not a Reformation leader in the same sense as Luther or Calvin, Erasmus was a humanist and scholar whose work

laid the intellectual groundwork for the Reformation. His critical edition of the Greek New Testament encouraged the study of Scripture and emphasized the need for reform within the Church. Erasmus championed a return to simple Christianity based on Scripture.

Conclusion

As we conclude our reflections on this Reformation Sunday, we are reminded of the critical themes of restoration, obedience, faithfulness, and light. Just as King Josiah sought to restore true worship, we are called to evaluate our own lives and ensure that our worship is genuine and reflective of God's heart. In our worship, let us remember the importance of listening to God's voice and responding to His call. May we rest in the assurance of God's faithfulness, trusting in His grace that sustains us. And as we embrace our identity as lights in the world, let us shine brightly, sharing the hope and love of Christ with those around us. As we celebrate the Reformation, may it inspire us to continue seeking renewal in our faith and our communities, drawing closer to God and reflecting His light in a world that desperately needs it.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank You for the gift of Your Word and the truth revealed through Your Son, Jesus Christ. As we celebrate this Reformation Sunday, help us to embrace the themes of restoration, obedience, faithfulness, and light. May our worship be genuine, our hearts receptive, and our lives a reflection of Your love. Empower us to shine brightly in our communities, drawing others to You. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.