

26 October, 2025

20th Sunday after Pentecost Reformation Sunday

Reformation and Renewal in the Light of God's Word

2 Kings 23:1-9, Psalm 81:1-14, Romans 11:1-6, Luke 11:33-end

Key Verse: *"Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eyes are healthy, your whole body also is full of light. But when they are unhealthy, your body also is full of darkness."* Luke 11:34

Today we celebrate Reformation Sunday, a time to reflect on the need for spiritual renewal and reformation in the church and our lives. The Reformation, sparked by figures like Martin Luther in the 16th century, was not merely a political or cultural event, but a spiritual revival that emphasized a return to the teachings of the Bible, salvation by faith alone, and the importance of God's grace. The passages for today's sermon - 2 Kings 23:1-9, Psalm 81:1-14, Romans 11:1-6, and Luke 11:33-end - remind us of the enduring need for renewal, reformation, and rediscovery of God's Word. Just as the Reformation of the 16th century was a response to spiritual complacency, every generation is called to be vigilant, to evaluate its walk with God, and to return to the central teachings of Scripture. Today, we will look at four key points of reformation in our hearts and in the church: the rediscovery of God's Word, renewal in worship, faith in God's grace, and the light of Christ shining in our lives.

1. Rediscovery of God's Word Leads to Reformation (2 Kings 23:1-9)

The passage from 2 Kings 23:1-9 recounts one of the greatest reforms in the history of Israel - King Josiah's reforms. At the heart of this reformation was the rediscovery of the Book of the Law during the temple renovations. Upon

hearing the words of the law, Josiah tore his robes in grief, recognizing how far the people had strayed from God's commands.

King Josiah's response was radical and swift. He gathered all the people, read the words of the law, and renewed the covenant with God. He then cleansed the land of idolatry, removing all traces of false worship. This story highlights the power of God's Word in bringing about reformation. When we stray from the truths of Scripture, we lose our way, just as Israel did. The church needs to continually return to the Word of God as its foundation for teaching, preaching, and living. Likewise, in our personal lives, the Bible must be the central authority that guides our decisions and actions. The Reformation in the 16th century was also rooted in the rediscovery of Scripture. The reformers, like Martin Luther, saw that the church had drifted from biblical teachings and called for a return to *sola scriptura* - Scripture alone as the basis for faith and practice. Let us commit ourselves to a renewed study of God's Word, allowing it to transform our lives. Are we spending time daily in Scripture, allowing it to reform our hearts and minds? When the Word of God is rediscovered in our lives, it leads to personal and communal renewal.

2. True Reformation Brings Renewal in Worship (Psalm 81:1-14)

Psalm 81 is a call to worship and obedience. It begins with a joyous call to sing aloud to God and raise a shout of praise. Yet, it also contains a warning from God: "But my people would not listen to me; Israel would not submit to me" (v. 11). As a result, they experienced hardship, not because God desired it, but because they refused to heed His voice. True reformation brings about not only a return to God's Word but also a renewal in worship. When we hear and obey God's Word, our worship becomes sincere, joyful, and meaningful. However, when we turn away from God, our worship becomes hollow, and we fall into spiritual complacency. In the Reformation period, worship was transformed. The reformers emphasized congregational singing, the centrality of the preaching of the Word, and the sacraments as a means of grace. They moved away from rituals that had become detached from biblical truth and brought worship back to its scriptural foundation.

How is our worship today? Is it filled with joy and obedience, or has it become routine and lifeless? True worship flows from hearts that are submitted to God's Word. As we celebrate Reformation Sunday, may our worship be renewed by a deep commitment to listen to and obey the voice of God.

3. Faith in God's Grace, Not Works (Romans 11:1-6)

Romans 11:1-6 reminds us of the grace of God, a central theme of the Reformation. Paul, writing to the Romans, emphasizes that salvation is not based on works but on grace: "So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace" (v. 5-6). This passage recalls how God, even in times of rebellion, always preserves a faithful remnant. Paul refers to the remnant of Israel that remains faithful, not because of their righteousness, but because of God's grace. The reformers proclaimed that salvation is by grace through faith alone (*sola gratia* and *sola fide*), rejecting the notion that human works or merit could earn salvation. Faith in God's grace transforms us from people who strive to earn God's favour to people who rest in His love and mercy. This grace calls us to reform our hearts, not to achieve salvation but in response to the salvation we have already received. Have we become like those who depend on our own works or achievements for our relationship with God? The Reformation reminds us that we are saved by grace alone. Let us place our faith not in our efforts but in the finished work of Christ on the cross.

4. Letting the Light of Christ Shine (Luke 11:33-end)

In the Gospel reading, Luke 11:33-end, Jesus speaks about the importance of light. "No one lights a lamp and puts it in a place where it will be hidden, or under a bowl. Instead, they put it on its stand, so that those who come in may see the light" (v. 33). Jesus is calling His listeners to live lives that reflect His light to the world. This passage challenges us to examine how we live out the faith we profess. Are we hiding the light of Christ, or are we letting it shine in a way that illuminates the darkness around us? The Reformation was a time when the light of the Gospel was brought out from under the obscurity of human traditions and made visible to all. Likewise, we are called to be people who shine Christ's light in our families, communities, and workplaces. True reformation in our lives occurs when we allow the light of Christ to cleanse the darkness within us. We are called to remove anything that obscures that light - sin, selfishness, and pride - and to let Christ's light shine brightly for others to see. Are there areas of our lives where we are hiding the light of Christ? As we reflect on this passage, let us recommit to living as people of the light, letting our faith shine before others so that they may see the glory of God.

When we speak of Reformation Sunday, the name Martin Luther immediately comes to mind as a central figure in the Protestant Reformation. However, there were other key leaders who contributed to the movement and

the renewal of the church. Let's briefly explore the role of Martin Luther and a few other notable Reformation leaders and their lasting contributions.

1. Martin Luther (1483–1546)

Martin Luther, a German monk, theologian, and professor, is often considered the father of the Protestant Reformation. His key contribution was his emphasis on *sola scriptura* (Scripture alone), *sola fide* (faith alone), and *sola gratia* (grace alone) as the foundation of salvation. These principles were in response to the prevailing belief that salvation could be earned through good works, indulgences, and rituals. Luther's bold action in 1517 - nailing his 95 Theses to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg—sparked the Reformation. The theses critiqued the sale of indulgences and questioned the authority of the Pope, urging the church to return to biblical teachings. Some of Luther's key contributions include:

- **Translation of the Bible into German:** Luther believed that the Bible should be accessible to all people, not just the clergy. His translation of the Bible into vernacular German allowed ordinary people to read and interpret Scripture for themselves.
- **The doctrine of justification by faith:** Luther taught that salvation comes through faith in Jesus Christ alone, and not through works or the mediation of the church. This doctrine remains a cornerstone of Protestant theology.
- **Worship reforms:** Luther encouraged congregational singing, preached in the common language, and revised the liturgy to reflect biblical truths.

Luther's courage in standing up to the established church hierarchy led to significant religious and social changes across Europe, but his reforms also laid the foundation for the various Protestant denominations we see today.

2. John Calvin (1509–1564)

John Calvin, a French theologian and pastor, was another influential leader of the Reformation, particularly in Geneva, Switzerland. Calvin's major contribution was his systematic theology, which he laid out in his monumental work, "Institutes of the Christian Religion" (1536). His theological insights shaped much of Protestant thought and are especially central to the Reformed tradition. Key contributions of John Calvin include:

- **Doctrine of predestination:** Calvin emphasized God's sovereignty and introduced the idea of predestination, the belief that God has chosen, before the foundation of the world, who will be saved and who will not.
- **Church organization and polity:** Calvin set up a system of church government based on a Presbyterian model, where churches were governed by elected elders, rather than by bishops or a pope. This democratic structure influenced many Protestant churches.
- **Emphasis on the authority of Scripture:** Like Luther, Calvin upheld the belief in sola scriptura and taught that Scripture alone was the ultimate authority for Christians.

Calvin's influence extended far beyond Geneva, as his theological teachings spread across Europe, inspiring the Puritans in England, the Huguenots in France, and later the development of Presbyterianism in Scotland.

3. Huldrych Zwingli (1484–1531)

Huldrych Zwingli was a Swiss reformer who played a significant role in the Reformation in Zurich, Switzerland. Although Zwingli's movement developed separately from Luther's, they shared many common goals, including the return to biblical authority and the rejection of church corruption. Some of Zwingli's key contributions include:

- **Rejection of Catholic mass:** Zwingli was radical in his rejection of the traditional Catholic mass, which he saw as unbiblical. He replaced it with a simple communion service focused on the remembrance of Christ's sacrifice.
- **Iconoclasm:** Zwingli believed in the removal of religious images, statues, and decorations from churches, arguing that these objects led to idolatry. His reforms called for a more austere form of worship, with a focus solely on the Word of God.
- **Scripture as the sole guide:** Zwingli also emphasized the role of Scripture as the sole guide for faith and practice, similar to Luther and Calvin. He is credited with bringing about many liturgical and theological reforms in Zurich.

Although Zwingli died in battle in 1531, his influence continued through the Swiss Reformation and later impacted Anabaptist and Reformed movements.

4. John Knox (1514–1572)

John Knox was a Scottish reformer and the founder of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland. Knox was heavily influenced by John Calvin during his time in Geneva, and he brought those Reformed ideas back to Scotland. Knox's major contributions include:

- **Presbyterian polity:** Knox established a church governed by elders, rather than bishops, following the model of Calvin's Geneva. This democratic system of church governance became a hallmark of Presbyterianism.
- **The Scottish Reformation:** Knox was a key figure in the Scottish Reformation, which led to the establishment of Protestantism as the national religion of Scotland. His fierce preaching and writing against Catholicism helped to transform Scotland into a Protestant nation.

Knox's emphasis on the sovereignty of God, the authority of Scripture, and church governance by elected elders profoundly shaped the development of Reformed theology and Presbyterianism across the world.

5. Philip Melanchthon (1497–1560)

Philip Melanchthon was a close associate of Martin Luther and a leading figure in the Lutheran Reformation. While Luther was bold and confrontational, Melanchthon was more diplomatic, helping to bridge divides between different Protestant groups. His contributions include:

- **Laying the foundations of Lutheran theology:** Melanchthon was instrumental in drafting the **Augsburg Confession** (1530), a foundational statement of Lutheran beliefs.
- **Emphasis on education:** Melanchthon is often called the "Teacher of Germany" because of his work in reforming the educational system. He advocated for schools that taught not only theology but also the liberal arts, emphasizing the importance of education in Christian faith.

Melanchthon's role in codifying Lutheran doctrine and fostering dialogue among reformers made him one of the most significant figures in the Reformation.

Conclusion

The contributions of Martin Luther, John Calvin, Huldrych Zwingli, John Knox, Philip Melancthon, and many other reformers remind us that reformation is an ongoing process. The Reformation was not merely about breaking away from the Roman Catholic Church; it was about returning to the core truths of Scripture, rediscovering the doctrines of grace, and reforming the church's practices to reflect biblical principles. As we reflect on these leaders and their impact on the church, we are reminded that we too are called to be agents of reformation. Each generation must examine itself, rediscover the truths of Scripture, and reform its worship, theology, and practices to align with the gospel of Christ.

Reformation Sunday is a reminder that God continues to work through His people, renewing and reforming the church so that it may shine the light of Christ into a dark world. Reformation Sunday is a reminder that the church, and each of us individually, is always in need of reformation. Just as King Josiah rediscovered the Word of God and brought renewal to Israel, we are called to rediscover the Word and allow it to reform our lives. Our worship, our faith in God's grace, and the light of Christ within us must continually be renewed. The Reformation was not just a historical event, but an ongoing call to the church to return to the teachings of Scripture, to reform its practices, and to live in the light of Christ. As we celebrate this day, may we be inspired to allow God to bring reformation and renewal in our own lives and in the church today.

Prayer

Gracious and loving God, we thank You for the gift of Your Word and the light it brings into our lives. As we reflect on the Reformation and the renewal it brought to Your church, we ask for Your grace to reform and renew us today. Help us to rediscover the truths of Scripture, to worship You in spirit and in truth, and to live by the grace You have given us. May the light of Christ shine brightly in our lives, leading others to know You. Comfort us in our struggles, encourage us in our faith, and guide us in Your ways. In the name of Jesus, our Savior and Lord, we pray. Amen.