**St Andrew’s on The Terrace Sunday 1 October 2017 Pentecost 17 ‘Why Reformation?’**

**Hebrew Bible Micah 6: 6-9a What God Requires**

‘With what shall I come before the Lord, / and bow myself before God on high?

Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, / with calves a year old?

Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, / with tens of thousands of rivers of oil?

Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, / the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?’

He has told you, O mortal, what is good;/ and what does the Lord require of you

but to do justice, and to love kindness,/ and to walk humbly with your God?

**Epistle Ephesians 2: 4-10**

But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

**Contemporary Reading “Christianity undergoes revolution every 500 years. Including now!”**

[http://vancouversun.com/news/staff-blogs/ christianity-undergoes-revolution-every-500-years-including-now](http://vancouversun.com/news/staff-blogs/%20christianity-undergoes-revolution-every-500-years-including-now)

***Q: What happens to the church during this giant rummage sale?***

**Tickle:** During these times of rearrangement and upheaval, the institutionalized church throws off things that are restricting its growth. When that mighty upheaval happens, history shows that at least three things always happen.

First, a new, more vital form of Christianity emerges. Second, the organized expression of Christianity, which up until then had been the dominant one, is reconstituted into a more pure and less ossified expression of its former self. During the Protestant Reformation, both the reformers, and those they are reacting against, ended up being better churches.

Finally, every time the incrustations of an overly established Christianity is broken open, the faith has spread dramatically, thereby increasing the range and depth of the church’s reach. Following the Protestant Reformation, Christianity was spread over far more of the earth’s territories than had ever been true in the past.

Every religion is subject to becoming encrusted and institutionalized over time. It appears to take the Abrahamic faiths—Christianity, Judaism and Islam—about 500 years before people rebel and seek reform. When that happens, new and vigorous expressions of faith break out, breaking the moulds that have held them and scattering the pieces.

***Q. What are people looking for during this Great Emergence?***

**Tickle:**People are looking for a new and different encounter with God. The strength of Protestantism was its rationalism—it took religion to the head. But today people want religion that also touches their hearts. It’s not anti-intellectual; mind and reason are still very important. But people want more than just an intellectual challenge. They want something that moves them emotionally, as well. It is bringing the heart and the head together.

One characteristic of this emergent view of the church is a return to, and recovery of, liturgy and connectedness to church history. Many western Christians have acted like the first 1,500 years of the church never happened—they start in the 1500s with Martin Luther and go from there.

But there is a rich tradition of church fathers and mothers who lived faithfully and thoughtfully between those two events. The emergent church is going back to that time and finding deep meaning as they use those old prayers and litanies in worship, along with things like the *Book of Common Prayer.*

The title today is ‘Why Reformation?’ and I am wondering why I committed myself to such a series of five reflections on reformation! However, a 500 year anniversary is worth marking especially when it is one which has brought us all together here. A clergy colleague asked me if this series was a reflection for every 100 years! If it is, 15-20 minutes is a small time to allocate to a century of Protestant faithfulness and observance. The first Sunday in October is always World Communion Sunday so it is also appropriate that this month we look at the very first beginnings of the worldwide protestant family of churches – a family which like all families has dis-unity, unions and reunions. Today we consider some of the ideas behind the reformation. Later we will look at individuals, the influence of printing, the effect on Europe and what is has meant for us.

First it is vital to recognise the 16th century Catholic and Protestant churches we will consider are not the same as those churches now. If in these five weeks there you from me any critique of either, that is a 21st century view – they and we are very different. Not only do we find delving into the Protestant reformation that there were plenty of people beside Luther calling for reform of the contemporary mother church, but also there have been many changes in the Protestantism of then and the Protestantism of now. I doubt many of us would sit comfortably within that church though we’d find similarities between them. Also it’s vital to remember there were men & women of good faith on both sides and still are.

Put yourselves in that time. In your community there is a strong community-wide belief in and fear of the reality of Hell’s damnation. You also know conforming to church rituals to ensure eternal salvation was essential. You don’t expect Church and society to be separate. You know the far off Pope influenced life in your far flung city state, including gathering of taxes. Your Germany was regarded as a soft touch for the church’s search for money to re-build in Rome, a place you would never see. You would not know that in this period Michelangelo (1475-1564) was commissioned for his stunning renaissance art in the Sistine chapel, completed only 5 years before Luther’s first major protest in 1517. You would not know Michelangelo died the same year as Calvin. You may not have known the French lawyer turned Swiss priest Jean Calvin.

You know that if church and God had power of damnation over you, being right with them kept your world stable. For you, excommunication from the church was a kind of hell on earth. Others in the village whom you had known all your life would shun you, boycott your shop or not trade with you. Your family threw you out. You lost goodwill and trust of others and your livelihood. You saw it happen and wouldn’t want to have it happen to you.

The Bible was not available to you and your fellow villagers, prior to the invention of the Gutenberg press in 1439. It was not available to anyone in a local language until Wycliffe’s Middle English Bible in the fourteenth century and Luther’s German Bible in the sixteenth century. (How many Bibles are in 21st century Christina homes?). And anyway, unless you were middle class none of you would have been able to read it even in your own language as you had never been taught to read. You did like those glorious stained glass windows telling the storeis of the bible and the saints and the travelling passion plays[[1]](#footnote-1) which acted out the drama of God and the changing colours of the liturgical seasons in church – all visual aids for the illiterate. But you also knew that even had it been more widely available, the Bible was not the main source of ecclesiastical wisdom either. Church tradition and current papal encyclicals shaped your religious and secular life.

You knew that if you kept up required practices, lived a moral life and showed charity, then heaven was more likely than hell. And increasingly there were other opportunities offered – masses to be said on your and others’ behalf, sometimes for those already departed this life to ensure they made it through purgatory to heaven. (It was the hasty factory life performance of these many masses which horrified Luther on his trip to Rome in 1510.)

In church you would not have noticed that there were many ways in which distance was maintained between you, the people, and God. During mass you stood patiently with the congregation in the cathedral behind the great choir screens standing between you and the choir area where the choir of local monks, the priests and the High Altar were. At the Eucharist you expected to only receive the bread, as only priests received ‘in both kinds’, the bread and the wine. The mass in Latin had a familiar rhythm but you understood little of the language.

What’s more, for you the way to God was littered with helpful people, the saints and Mary could be interceded with, the priest would hear your confession and help you to make good through the performance of penances. You were clear that the priest stood as Christ’s representative in the confessional as well as at the Eucharist, the one who dispensed absolution and also communion.

It can be seen from the timeline that from the fourteenth century John Wycliffe, Jan Hus and less famous others had been protesting and writing about reform. These protests were already in the air as Luther entered the clergy. One particular touchpaper for Luther was his trip to Rome on business for his order in 1510. He had shown prodigious promise, completing his Bachelor’s degree in a year, his Masters in minimum time and being promoted to Professor of Biblical Studies at Wittenberg at only 29 years of age. Luther was given a busy academic workload by his religious superior to help keep his anxiety over his salvation at bay. Johann Tetzel had begun an aggressive drive selling indulgences within Germany in 1506 while Luther was in priest training. This was to fund the Archbishop of Mainz’s obligations to Rome for rebuilding St Peter’s Basilica. Indulgences were used to reduce punishment for sins confessed, but by the late middle Ages, official Church doctrine was being abused both by high prices demanded and by diversion of funds to expensive projects like crusades and cathedrals.

In Rome Luther saw these ambitious building projects, hasty, careless performances of masses purchased by hopeful Christians and less than virtuous living by clergy. He was horrified.

Seven years later, Luther sends to his archbishop his ninety five topics for an academic disputation on reform in the Church, (mostly on the subject of indulgences). Popular legend has it he nailed them to the door of the local Wittenberg church. Since parish doors were the local community board that may well be.

We don’t have time to discuss 95 topics now, but through this action and subsequent debate, argument, dissension, war and turmoil, which you can see hinted at in the timeline, by the twentieth century, the core of the protestant reformation came to be finally expressed as the five ‘solas’.

The second two *solae* ‘grace’ and ‘faith’ were expressly mentioned by the reformers of the sixteenth century. All five appear in their writings but were not grouped together by any of them. You will see the correlation though of the five with the description of the church of the time which I gave earlier.

**1. By scripture alone *- ‘Sola Scriptura’.***  The Bible was represented as the original and supreme source of God’s will for the world, which should govern humanly-produced church documents and decrees. That is why the confessions of faith held by Presbyterians are called subordinate standards, naming them as subordinate to the Bible. It’s why evangelical Christians need a biblical basis for their actions and doctrine.

**2. By grace alone – *‘Sola Gratia’.*** A breakthrough for Luther on reading Romans 8 which Wendy read earlier, was that we are all saved by grace – by the undeserved favour of God, not by sacramental forgiveness or ritual. Infant baptism can be seen as an acting out of this grace. A baby has not had the time or ability to earn this grace yet its baptism to show its presence in the baby’s life already.

**3. By faith alone – *‘Sola Fide’.*** Salvation is achieved when we accept that gift of grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Indulgences, practices, prayers did not save you, only grace given by God. Good works are not a means to salvation. These practices might follow in gratitude, as the Christian seeks to learn and grow; they are seen as spiritual fruits produced by the faithful person, but do not save us.

**4. By Christ alone – *‘Solus Christus’*.** In Protestant reform, salvation was seen as coming through Christ alone – not through priest or Pope or performance of works or sacramental observance. This also led in the Protestant tradition to the idea of the ‘priesthood of all believers’ where any person could approach God and deal directly, not needing to go through intermediaries such as clergy or saints.

**5. To God alone the glory *‘Soli Deo Gloria’.*** Praise and adoration given by the grateful Christian, now free and forgiven and assured of a bright eternal future, is to go to God, not to God’s earthly representatives on earth or to the church itself. The glory reserved for God is also not to be given to Mary the mother of Jesus or the saints. As a result, the Protestant church abolished saint’s days and reserved worship only for Sundays. As a corollary, it was 1940 before church services were held in New Zealand Presbyterian churches on a Christmas Day which did not fall on a Sunday and Good Friday services are still not held in some denominations.

It is curious to realise that a group of people speaking out their truth sometimes in isolated areas, at other times in universities like Wycliffe and Luther, at other times in homes and parish churches; risking life and livelihood, family and faith, so heavily influenced five centuries of religion and society. We will look at some of those influences in the coming weeks. It is curious to realise how thoroughly those individuals influenced our lives and our lives’ direction. May we accept and live out the grace they embraced and live into the grace they revealed which in turn has been shown to us. So may it be.

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1. The stationery Oberammergau Passion Play, performed every decade was first performed in 1634 as a response of the village to being spared the plague. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)