

Ecclesia Reformata, Semper Reformanda:
October 24, 2026

A few years back... **[1 One Flow]**

We installed a whole house water filtration system.
Because our water softener died.
So we wanted to try a different approach.

One that did not require...
The maintenance...
Of buying big old bags of salt...
At the Home Depot or Lowe's...
Lugging the bags down the steps...
And filling the softener...
In a cloud of salt dust.

So instead.
We bought a system... that... and I quote...
Is a salt-free scale prevention...
And whole-house water filtration system...
Designed to protect plumbing and appliances...
While improving tap water taste.

Sounds great... doesn't it?
Solving problems...
Fighting those hard minerals...
And making water taste good!
Alright.

Until this week.
It was time to replace the filter...
Because filters wear out...
And need to be replaced.

The particular filter I needed...
Is... and again I quote...
OUT OF STOCK.
Everywhere.

So I got a knock off brand from the Amazon.
Went to install it.
Guess what???
Doesn't fit.
Despite the online guarantee...
That it would fit this particular system.

So then. I composed an email...
Sent it off to the manufacturer...
And am still waiting.
While the system continues...
To do it's thing...
Fight it's battle...

Against the evil scale and lime...
That collects in inconvenient places.

And the filter gets...
Heavier and dirtier...
With extracted minerals.

Have you ever... **[2 Obstacles]**
Experienced anything like that?

Have you ever...
Had your life in perfect order...
Things were perking along...
Just the way you wanted them to be...

Then all the sudden...
You meet an obstacle.
Something that ruins...
The way things are working...
Or the way you want things to be.

And then... what next?
Well... you have to adapt.
You have to figure it out.
You have to find new ways...
To do what you want to do.

You are forced to change.

At this exact point... while I was writing this sermon...
The wind was blowing like crazy outside.
We have wind chimes...
That make a really beautiful sound...

But the wind was blowing way too hard.
And the chimes...
Kept banging against the house.

I stopped writing... and went out to check...
You know.. the weight that dangles in the wind...
Had repeatedly slammed up against the siding...
And scrapped off the white paint...
Of the trim of the house.

So now... we have to do something... right.
We have to respond..
We have to move the chimes.
AND... we have to paint the trim.
And so it goes...with all systems...

Or as Robbie Burns said it...
The best laid plans of mice and men...
Err oft go awray. **[3 Reformation]**

Well. Happy Reformation Weekend.
This is the time... we remember... and celebrate...
That there was a system... of religion...
That was perking along...
Just the way... the leaders of the church...
Wanted it to be...

Of course... it was a system...
That unfortunately... was hurting...
The people of God.

It propagated the idea...
That the church...
Could stand as a gate...
Between... God and God's people.

They made it clear...
That if people wanted to know God...
They needed to live through the church.

And along the way... the church could...
Make unreasonable demands...
And burdensome requirements...

The church could make you pay...
For life and hope...
For forgiveness and the love of God.

The church... made people feel...
As though they had to choose...
Whether they would use their resources...
To thrive and survive...

Or pay the church...
In order to reduce the time...
That their predecessors spent in purgatory.

And who wouldn't want...
To reduce the time...
That your parent or grandparent...
Had to spend... in the eternal waiting room of purgatory.

Who wouldn't do whatever they could...
To open the gates of heaven...
For the people they love.

What would you give...
To set your people free?

The system was broken.
It wasn't really about who God is...
Or what God does... anymore...
It wasn't about the Truth of God's Word.

It wasn't about the grace of God...
Freely given to us...
Through the love and the sacrifice... of Jesus.
And the idea that if the Son sets you free...
You are free indeed.

It was about... the church...
Controlling the people...
And bending the Truth...

The system was severely broken.

But... as always happens...
When a system is broken...
And calls for a response...
And something has to change.

And it wasn't a strong change... at first.
This grew from an innocent seed...
Planted by a man...
Who was just trying to start...
A conversation about the practice of the church.

He was a priest and a professor...
At Wittenberg University...
A teacher of Sacred Theology.

And what he was teaching...
And how the Holy Spirit was moving...
And what the church was claiming...
All came together...
In a grinding internal conflict...

Which turned into... words...
Something he needed to say.

So he did... what people did at that time... **[4a Theses]**
He wrote a document...
An argument.
An invitation...
To a conversation...

And nailed this document...
To the doors of the Castle Church...
At the University of Wittenberg...

Just like today...
When students tape things...
To the light poles...
Near the Universities...
Trying to get our attention.
That door... was the message board of the day.

But back on October 31st, 1517...
The winds of change were blowing...
Way harder than he expected.
And the students... who read...
What had been nailed to those doors...

Their hearts were set on fire...
By the words of freedom and life and hope...
They thought to themselves...
We can reclaim our church. **[4b Printing Press]**

And also... remember... the printing press...
Had been invented around 1450...
Just 70 years before Martin Luther...
Nailed the paper to the door.

So these 95 sentences...
These 95 ideas...
These 95 theses...
Were taken by the students...
And translated... in the language of the people...
And reproduced and distributed...
Far and wide.

So the common people... could read... for themselves...
What this teacher was saying... in their own language..
And they thought to themselves...
We can reclaim our church.

And at that point...
Everything began to change.
Because the system was broken.
The church was broken.

And it was time...
For something new.

The other night... at confirmation...
We played a game with the students... **[5 Latin]**
It's called "Latin Phrases That EVERYONE Should Know."

Do y'all want to play?
All you have to do... is tell me what the phrase means.

Five phrases... here we go. **[6 Seize]**

Carpe Diem. **[7 Many One]**
E pluribus unum. **[8 Something]**
Quid pro quo. **[9 I Came]**
Veni. Vidi. Vici. **[10 Buyer]**
Caveat emptor.

Then I put this BONUS Phrase. **[11 Ecclesia]**

Up on the screen... for them... to think about...
While they did an activity.
Ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda.

The activity was... **[12 Clay]**
They each were given a block of clay...
And I asked them to make...
Something they loved...
Something important to them...

And they did.

Then... I asked them...
What they thought the bonus phrase meant. **[13 Ecclesia]**

And you should not be surprised...
That they were able to figure it out.
They sounded out the words they knew...
And finally... we ended up with...

The church reformed...
Always needs reforming...

And when they realized...
What the phrase said...
Some of them knew...
What was going to happen next.

Pastor Alix and I... smashed their clay projects...
And told them... they had to start again.

Ok. Kind of mean.
But we wanted to make the point...
That the church... even though it is reformed...
Will need to be reformed again... and again... and agin.

The church always needs to be reformed.
We can't stand on the way things used to be.
We can't think that we have it all figured out.
Because we don't.

And if we want to be relevant... we can't be stagnant...
While the world moves and changes around us.

However... we need to remember...
In the midst of the changes around us...
We have an unmovable truth... at our center...

We have the gospel.
The love of Jesus Christ...
Lived out in his words and deeds.
Jesus is the one thing that does not change. **[14 The Same]**

Hebrews 13:8... states...
Jesus Christ is the same...
Today... tomorrow... and forever.

We also have the unwavering promise of forgiveness...
When we come before God... and confess our sin...
We are given the opportunity to begin again.
It's not too late.
It's never too late...
To begin again.

We also have the promise of eternal life.
We do not mourn... as people who have no hope.
We do not give up... even in the face of death.
We know that our redeemer lives...
And so will we.

So we... as the church... and members of the church...
Hold these unmovable truths...
In a changing world.

So the question for us... is...

How do we present that truth?

How do we engage the world...
In ways that lead to life and hope?

What do we need to change... about us...
In order to impact the world around us?

What do we need to reform?

So the other part of the confirmation class...
Was that each group... each student...
Had the chance to meet with two members...
Of the call committee.

Pastor Alix and I... asked them...
To take it seriously... to understand...
That it was an honor...
For them to get a voice...
In the process of calling another pastor.

That this was a really good thing.

And they did.
They took it seriously.
They shared their ideas...
Their hopes...
Their dreams...
For the future...
With the call committee.

So listen. **[15 Reclaim]**

Can you imagine a church...
That listens to the needs and the concerns...
Of the youth?

Can you imagine...
What it will mean...
To say to potential pastoral candidates...
That every member... of Joy Lutheran...
Including the young people...
Had a voice...
Had the opportunity...
To form the future of this church?

Can you... my friends in Christ...
Can you imagine... a time...
When you could say...
This is my church.
This is my voice.
And this is what I hope...
For the future...

Well... that time is now.
The future is being shaped... today.
This is your church.

And just like those students...
Who read Luther's words...
With excitement and hope...

And just like the people...
Who read the 95 theses...
In their own language...
And dreamed of a new church.

Just like that... you and I...
Can reclaim our church...
Over and over again.

We can hold our church accountable...
When it goes astray...

We can make sure... that our church...
Proclaims the unchangeable Truth of Jesus Christ...
In a changing world...

We can design a place...
That gives hope...
To people who need hope.

We can reform.

Reform our hearts.
Reform our lives.
Reform our church.

It's our responsibility...
To not get too comfortable...

Because...
The church is not done...
And it never will be.

The church reformed...
Is always being reformed.

And that's just the way...
God wants it to be.

Thanks be to God.
Amen.