



Determined to Share the Gospel
1 Thessalonians 2:1-8; Matthew 22:34-46
Reverend Giuseppe Mattei (October 29, 2023)

This week we celebrate Reformation Sunday, remembering when Martin Luther started the Reformation movement in Germany by sharing his 95 theses. At the time, the Roman Catholic church dominated all of Europe. It had turned into an organization that often used the faith of the people to accumulate power, influence, and wealth instead of walking alongside them in a life of faith.

The church had set itself up as an unquestionable authority: anything the church said was the truth. Luther, who was teaching the Bible to men training to be priests, thought he saw discrepancies between the Bible and church teachings. The 95 theses, based on these perceived discrepancies, were assertions which Luther wanted to debate with other theologians. He hoped to correct errors which had crept into church teaching and practice.

Luther's goal wasn't freedom from the church. He first tried to reform the church from within. His primary concern was to free people from what felt like slavery to sin. Luther felt deeply oppressed by his own sin, never feeling he had confessed enough or been penitent enough. It was through God's word that Luther found freedom in the truth that we are saved by grace received through faith, not through works (actions we take to try to make up for our sins and earn God's forgiveness).

Last week, we spent some time considering God's gifts to the Church, that is to each of us for the growth of the Body of Christ. God's gifts are not for individual consumption but for sharing among God's people. The closer to God and others we grow the more we are aware of and willing to use God's gifts for the flourishing of the community. The more we incarnate the Spirit of Christ the more God walks the Earth in us and

through us. We are more than Christ-ians (people who espouse a certain belief set); we are Christ-like (people who live a certain Way).

How do we steward our blessings in this world? When I receive, enjoy, and show gratitude for the blessings received, I feel inspired to share them, use them for and with others. Blessing means something like “I know I’m OK, by the grace of God, no matter how things are. God is with me in good days and bad. The future belongs to God.”

How willing, trained, and ready are we to look beyond ourselves and see God at work among others even by using us? And how willing, trained, and ready are we to see God at work in others for the purpose of blessing us? How clear is our sight? Can we see God at work both ways, in all ways, and always for the purpose of bringing about the kingdom of peace, justice, and unity?

May we become docile instruments of God’s love in the world, being transformed to the point of accepting that we, individually and as a society and as a Church, are always in need of reforming our ways. Amen.