

October 28, 2018 Reformation Sunday
Rev. Jen Nagel, University Lutheran Church of Hope

Jeremiah 31:31-34, Psalm 46
Romans 3:19-28, John 8:31-36

[Bp. Elizabeth Eaton, statement on 10-27-18. Elsa Marty, Facebook photo.
Rabbi Michael Latz, email on 10-27-18]

Grace, pure, grace, and peace to you, dear ones in Christ Jesus. Amen.

This week I stumbled upon a set of post-it notes, really a photo of them.

Pale yellow squares, you know the look, extra tape applied at the top lest their stick grow weak,
placed in a row along the upper frame of a mirror, perhaps in a bedroom or above the bathroom sink,
the easier to view in the mundane comings and goings.

Here's what these post-it notes said, and in this order:

"Finish the race."

"You were made for this."

"Do not idolize your fear."

And on the final one, "And, when you can't believe in yourself, believe in this: My hope is not built on my
performance but on Jesus' righteousness."

My Facebook algorithms aren't in sync with this more distant friend, so I was glad to notice this photo at all.

It prompted a little exchange and I learned that she'd received these notes from one of her close friends while
in the depths of preparation for her dissertation exams. Can you identify?

"And, when you can't believe in yourself, believe in this: My hope is not built on my performance but on Jesus'
righteousness." Can I get an Amen?!

Today we celebrate not only Reformation Sunday but also Confirmation Sunday.

Let me offer a few words about Reformation, before we turn to Kelsey's Confirmation Faith Statement.

"My hope is not built on my performance but on Jesus' righteousness."

These words posted at the top on Elsa's mirror, framing her daily routines, capturing her truth...

they are at the very heart, the core, of our reforming tradition.

501 years ago Martin Luther first took a stand, unintentionally beginning the protestant reformation,
changing the course of history and the church.

Luther was imprisoned by guilt, by the should-s that clamored in his ears,

bound up by the anxieties around him,

witnessing the corruption in his own beloved catholic church.

and searching the scriptures and the heart of God to understand anew how we are forgiven, how we are justified, how grace comes to us, and then how we might respond.

By grace you are made free. Period.

Jesus lived it, Paul wrote it, Luther underlined it.

By grace we are saved, not by our performance, not by our smarts, not even by our good and just works, but by grace alone.

Hold fast to that, dear ones, hold fast to grace.

Grace that is a gift, uncontrolled, unmerited, Spirited, for you, for me, for our world. Grace.

From our readings this morning, Jeremiah's words ring out:

I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

A new covenant, on our hearts,

an unbreakable promise of relationship, forever: I will be your God, you will be my people.

I will forgive your wrongs and I will remember your sin no more.

The grace of God is written not only on those post-it notes,

but the grace of God is written on my heart, on your heart.

And that changes everything.

A couple weeks back, our racial justice team sponsored a book read and invited one of the essayists, David Lawrence Grant, to speak.

David invited us to *stretch our empathy muscles*.

Isn't that a powerful image: stretching our empathy muscles.

We can stretch these muscles because first we are rooted, grounded, deeply, in grace.

We know who we are.

We know whose we are.

We can trust that God's new promise has claimed us.

And from this place of promise, we can serve and love and practice—even when the tensions and complexity around are so numbing, exhausting, immobilizing.

I'm thinking of yesterday's hateful killing at Tree of Life, a synagogue in Pittsburgh.

Fear and hatred run rampant, so much violence to these beloved of God.

I'm thinking of the migrant caravan heading north, and instead of empathy, met by the voices, actions of fear.

I'm thinking of our trans and gender non-conforming siblings whose very identity is questioned, threatened.

I'm thinking of the encampment that grows at Franklin and Hiawatha.

Precisely because of our reforming tradition, our Lutheran tradition, this is the time to reach deeply into our core: to listen closely, stretching our empathy muscles.

We are called to respond from a place of grace: to send a note to our Jewish neighbors, to show up at a vigil, to change the dominant narrative and to risk vulnerability, to pray and to vote, to speak up with all our power, all our privilege, when fear could win the day.

One of my colleagues, Rabbi Michael Latz, put it this way last night: We must love each other, fiercely.

That is our response to the grace that first loves us: love each other fiercely.

The truth is, Martin Luther's anti-Semitic writings, and the hate they've fueled, are a painful reality of our tradition.

It's only in recent years that we as Christians of the Lutheran family have sought to name and confess this sin, to begin to right our broken relationships with the Jewish community.

Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton, wrote yesterday, quoting the ELCA's statement to the Jewish community.

"As Christians, and particularly as Lutherans, we deplore and reject this bigotry.

'We recognize in anti-Semitism a contradiction and affront to the Gospel, a violation of our hope and calling, and we pledge this church to oppose the deadly working of such bigotry, both within our own circles and in the society around us'"

Let me be clear, we don't do this to earn our grace.

Rather, we do this because grace is inscribed on hearts, written on our post it notes, taped carefully to our mirrors: held in love, we must love each other fiercely.

This morning Kelsey Felling affirms her baptism.

As is our tradition here at Hope, Kelsey shares her statement of faith.

This isn't an exam, there aren't rights and wrongs, but rather honest reflection and the courage to stand up and share of oneself in the midst of a community that holds and loves and welcomes and sends.

Kelsey is a 9th grader at St. Anthony Village High School and her folks are Bob and Tami Felling.

Kelsey is into dance, the high school marching band, and bowling.

Kelsey.... [Faith Statement]