

The Reverend Marjo Anderson

**M: Reformation Sunday
Thematic**

**25 October 2015
Salem, Bridgeport**

“Reformation DNA”

Today we celebrate the Reformation which began nearly 500 years ago.
As Lutherans we are proud of our heritage that began the Protestant Reformation.
But when we think about it, we are, of course, viewing it from this side of the event –
as something that happened in the past.
But imagine, if you would, that you were back there 500 years ago.
You are a devout Christian, and part of the Western Catholic Church, not the Eastern Orthodox one.

You go to church and you listen to the beautiful chanting of the priest and choir.
You don't understand everything that they are saying,
because they are speaking in the sacred language of Latin.
It's so beautiful and uplifting and it makes you feel you're in heaven listening to angel choirs.
You watch the priest in his ornate robes and vestments,
and you wonder what it would be like to live a priest's life –
married to God's very self, set apart from the drudgery of everyday life.
No toiling at a job, no worrying about keeping the wife and children fed;
nothing to do but pray and read scripture and lead worship
and work the miracle of turning bread and wine into Christ's body and blood,
and baptize and marry and bury.
Life was hard – but here at worship you found yourself transported to a different place, a higher sphere,
and that gave rest to your soul, fortifying you for the days ahead.

And then you hear about this rabble rouser who wanted to change everything.
Some monk had nailed a whole list of things on the church door –
your neighbor had said there were 95 of them!
One of the things he wanted to do was to get rid of Latin and have the priests speak in German!
That was crazy! Latin was sacred and German was – well, it was profane.
How could the priest and choir chanting in German transport you to that heavenly place?
The words would get in the way! They'd grate on your ears!
It would sound just like you were out on the street – not like you were in church!
And it was said he thought priests should be married and have kids!
Can you imagine? That would be like you being a priest, for goodness sake!
How could he be a priest, married to God, while he was having sex with a woman?!
It was scandalous, it was!
And how could a priest take care of all his priestly duties
if he had to be worried about taking care of his wife and kids?!

The guy was definitely a lunatic. Hopefully the church would get rid of him before he did any real damage!

OK. Were you able to imagine yourself on the other side of the Reformation?
where things were as they had always been in your life – and none of the changes had happened yet?

Most people at the time were not looking for change.
Church was what church had always been for them –
it was an anchor in their lives, a place of stability, a symbol of the changelessness of God's own self.
And then came this Martin Luther guy who wanted to change everything and throw it all into chaos!
That's the thing about change.
When we look back on it, we are very often glad for it, and grateful for the gifts it has brought into our lives.
But prior to the change, most of us are not looking for it,
because either we are happy the way things are, or at least we have grown accustomed to what is.

It's like fish. If you could ask a fish about the water in which it's swimming,
they'd probably say, "Water? What's water? I have no idea what you are talking about."

A fish doesn't know if the water is fresh or salty, if it's clean or polluted, if it's warm or cold.

The water that it is in is the only water that it knows.

And that's how it is with us humans as well.

We get so used to something that it seems as if that is all there is.

If you ask someone to describe the perfect Christian worship,

they might mention the beautiful sound of the organ in a Buxtehude prelude,

the glorious sound of the choir singing a Bach chorale in 4-part harmony,

the worship leaders and choir in robes and the pastor with velvet stole and chausable and gold cross,

the sonorous tones of scripture read in the New Revised Standard version of the Bible,

the congregation sitting in pews, then standing, then sitting again,

the powerful cross hanging over the altar and the altar covered with richly embroidered paraments.

That's one kind of Christian worship to be sure, but it is certainly not the only kind.

There are worship services held in storefronts, drive-in movie lots, & buildings that resemble theatres.

There are praise bands, and steel drums, and unaccompanied singing and some with no music at all.

There are congregations made up of folks in fancy clothes, and farming clothes, and biker jackets.

Scripture is sometimes read in King James English and sometimes in a contemporary paraphrase.

There are sermons that last 5 minutes and sermons that last 2 hours.

The thing is that we human beings, like fish, get so used to the way things are,
that it is difficult to even imagine things being any different.

And yet, the world changes, and as the world changes, so must the church.

All the things that we have come to love or at least to think of as normative
are the result of a change somewhere along the line.

And all of the things that future generations will come to love and think of as normative
will be the result of the changes that happen now and in the future.

We all know that the world has changed –

earlier in some of our lives the pond of Christianity teemed with fish,

but something has happen to the water and many fish have died off or gone in search of new ponds.

And if we don't want to die off or be forced into new ponds, we will have to do something to change the water.

That's scary. I know. But we have 3 things going for us that not every organization has:

The first is that in our DNA here at Salem we have a very special gene:

it's the "cutting edge" gene that enabled our congregation to build this building –
which at the time was unlike any other –

contemporary in design, and cutting edge in its construction and technology.

The second is that in our DNA as Lutherans we have another special gene:

it's the "visionary" gene that Martin Luther had

that enabled him to imagine a whole new church for a whole new world.

And finally, in our DNA as Christians we have the most important gene of all:

the "faith" gene that allows us to put our trust in God and in God alone.

We may not yet know where we are, or where we are going, or how we are to get from here to there,
but neither did Abraham, or the disciples, or Paul, or Luther.

They didn't know what the future would hold for them any more than we know what it holds for us.

But they had faith that God was with them and would show them the way if only they listened and followed.

As you leave worship this Reformation Sunday,

may you leave in the confidence that we have a distinct advantage over most congregations:

we here at Salem Lutheran Church have 3 special genes – cutting edge, visionary, and faith.

With that kind of DNA, there is no doubt Salem will be part of the continuing Reformation of Christ's church.

To God be the Glory! **Amen**