

Opening Reflections for Committees: October 2018

Witness and Fellowship Ministry Team

Reformation

People all over the world celebrated Martin Luther's bold stand for the German people that ended up changing the course of history. The only problem is, that's the wrong way of looking at the Reformation. It's not about a person, or a nation, or the progress of human history. It's about one thing, and one thing only. The Gospel.

The first wrong way to look at Reformation is to see it as a heroic stand of Martin Luther. Although Luther was indeed a larger than life character, it wasn't about him as a person. It wasn't about the common man standing up against the powers that be. If that was the case, then the Reformation would have ended with the death of Luther, and the Lutheran church would be nothing more than a cult of personality. But it's not that at all. The Reformation is about another person, a person of much greater significance.

The second wrong way to look at the Reformation is to see it as a movement of the German people. There is certainly a German element to the Reformation, and your Reformation celebrations may have included a German style meal, or an Oktoberfest complete with polka music. But the Reformation isn't about uniting Germans. As the first reading for the Festival of the Reformation says, its message is for "every nation and tribe and language and people" (Rev. 14:6).

The third wrong way to look at the Reformation is to see it as a moment in the progress of human history. This view of the Reformation sees it as the emergence of new, more enlightened way of thinking. It was a historical moment of casting off the shackles of old superstitions and breaking free from the authority of the institutional church, which squelched free thinking. But if the Reformation is just a moment in the progress of human history, that means that it only sets the stage for additional progress and it's no longer relevant for us except as a part of history.

So what is the right way to look at the Reformation? At its heart, the Reformation was a rediscovery of the Gospel. It's about Jesus, not Luther. Jesus is the real hero in this story, but not in the traditional sense. He suffered and died and rose and ascended so that sinners would be forgiven. The Gospel is the eternal message that is for the German people and for every nation and tribe and language and people, uniting them together into the one body of Christ. The rediscovery of the Gospel was a moment in history, but that moment reaches back to Abraham and the patriarchs, and now down to us. "For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law" (Rom. 3:28).

Prayer: Lord, as we celebrate the another anniversary of the Reformation, let us rediscover again and again the message that our righteousness is revealed in Christ, and that we are justified by faith, apart from works of the law. That's what the Reformation is all about. Amen