

## Sermon for October 31 – Reformation Sunday

Shivon Miller

Today is not only Halloween but it is also Reformation Sunday. And while the public is very familiar with Halloween, I would guess many of us are less than familiar with Reformation.

On Reformation Sunday, we as Lutherans remember our reforming roots. We recall Martin Luther who in the 16<sup>th</sup> century confronted the catholic church of that time with concern over beliefs and actions that he felt inconsistent with Christian truths. Martin Luther believed in grace and fought against church practices that communicated anything other than the free and total gift of forgiveness in Christ alone. He felt strongly that scripture should be in the hands of all people, not just powerful and fluent church leaders – working to translate the Bible into common tongue and varied languages. He believed in the priesthood of all believers, stressing God at work in and through all vocations. He called for church reform. It was not Luther's intent to start a new denomination of Christianity but rather his belief that the church should always be actively asking "What needs to be reformed in response to God's living Word today?"

Reformed. While sounding like a fairly formal term, it simply breaks down into RE – form, form again.

I have found myself thinking a lot about Playdoh this week. As you entered worship today you should have received a small container of Playdoh. I invite you to go ahead and take your Playdoh out of its little container. As I talk, I encourage you to go ahead and squish your Playdoh, shape it, mold it, stretch it. Playdoh is pretty pliant. It can easily be formed into one thing and then *re-formed* into something new.

However, sometimes as Playdoh gets older it can lose some of its flexibility. If it is left out of its container and is not carried for, it can actually turn rock hard. It can lose its created ability to be *reformed*.

The possibilities are endless as long as that Playdoh stays fresh. It can stretch and be shaped by imagination and delight in new forms brought about by the maker.

Following the metaphor yet?

In the Bible book of Jeremiah, the word of the Lord comes to Jeremiah: "Come, go down to the potter's house, and there I will let you hear my words." <sup>3</sup>So I went down to the potter's house, and there he was working at his wheel. <sup>4</sup>The vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter's hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as seemed good to him. <sup>5</sup>Then the word of the LORD came to me: <sup>6</sup>"Can I not do with you, O house of Israel, just as this potter has done?" says the LORD. 'Just like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand.'"

God says "I am the potter. You are the clay." God is able to form and reform as God deems good.

We are Playdoh. But do we remain pliant to God's hand?

I find it interesting that often in scripture when someone refuses to act as God desires they are described as having hardened. They have lost their ability to be re-formed by God.

In our assigned scripture readings for today we hear God's command again "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your might" and "Love your neighbor as yourself." Daily we place ourselves into God's hands and pray that God form and re-form us, as individuals and as collective church, to more fully live shaped by these commands. Daily we ask "Is there need for re-formation that we may more fully love God and neighbor?"

Re-formation has proven to be a difficult task for humanity.

I think back to playing Playdoh with my children. We loved to play Playdoh. We would make whole scenes, construct full menus, design new creatures never seen before. But the hardest part was when to keep playing meant disassembling and squishing some of what had been created to be able to keep creating, imagining and making something new. It was always hard to see the old creations go, even in spite of the excitement about what we would create next. Many a Playdoh playtime ended with leaving what had been made out on the counter because we couldn't bear to take it apart. Sadly, this Playdoh always dried up, hardened and could no longer be part of playtime and future imaginings and works.

This Reformation Sunday we as a church congregation once again consider – are we willing to take apart even some of our most beloved creations to be able to continue to be part of God's future imagining and works? Or will we harden and cease to be shaped by God's hands?

Baptism is of central importance in the Lutheran church. In Baptism we say that we daily die to our old selves and rise again to newness of life in Christ. Baptism is the celebration of re-formation. We are forgiven and made new each and every day – reformed. Living in our baptism keeps us fresh, enabling us to be flexible and formable no matter our age or tendency to harden into prior forms. God in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit is able to bring about a new creation.

Being reformed is nothing to fear if we trust the potter, the imagination of the creator, the hands that hold and shape us.

Play with your Playdoh this week and wonder, "God, am I pliable in your hands? How are you re-forming me? Your church? Keep us in play, soften our hardened forms. May your imagination continue to shape us into the new creation you deem good."