

10.25.2009

Reformation Sunday and Confirmation

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Romans 3:19-28

John 8:31-36

Wonderful youth, Eleanor, Sam, Sarah, and Jonas...I have walked with them, and it's been a privilege. They are funny and very thoughtful. They love each other. They have a sense of grace and can speak of their awareness of God and the kingdom of God. They have wrestled with biblical texts. They are quick to say what they think and understand. They trace the outlines of the story of Jesus in current films and songs. They're aware of what is wrong with the world: warfare, environmental destruction, racism. They know they are human and have both good and less good tendencies in themselves. They are prayer-s. They love the feeling of warmth and acceptance here at ALC,.

I ask you to remember that we need your thoughts, faith, struggles, and energies. Join a committee, join council, vote at the congregational meeting; and above all pray, read and study your Bibles, give your money to the church and other Jesus causes, and worship. If you want us to change parts of worship (and congregation, let me tell you that at least one want us to have a moving, jumping, shouting hymn in the middle of the service—can you handle that?

My sense is that they and others would like a bit more contemporary worship (which actually is ancient worship—remember David dancing before the ark?) I'll bring the idea to W & M, so you will know where that comes from when we invite you into that form of worship.

But lest we get hung up on worship styles, let's remember the deeper points.

God wants to remake you, keeping the best in you and making you passionate lovers and doers in God's kingdom.

Remember that the prophet Isaiah said, that they young men shall see visions....

God wants to put a new heart within you. (And not just into you but in everyone.)

And that new heart would create us more and more like Jesus: to see him more clearly, follow him more nearly, love him more dearly. And, in that way you will be doing God's will, as we pray in the Lord's Prayer.

Your heart changes, you grow in faith (that's what we mean by righteousness). And, then you will act in a loving way. (But if your heart doesn't feel loving—and that happens to us—then act lovingly and usually your heart catches up.)

Don't forget that the world wants to define you by what you have and buy, the clothes you wear, the money you have. Supposedly that will make you good and free people.

But, actually true freedom is in loving God and Jesus and in being yourself in this loving, imperfect, and growing community, Ascension.

What was the Reformation about, I suggested to them, but Luther's helping Christians understand that they could read the scriptures (which he translated) and have an individual relationship with God, with Jesus. They did not need to rely on the authority of a priest; they did not have to have money in order to make themselves right with God. They could believe (trust in) in God's grace of love and forgiveness.

Jesus taught us to pray "Thy will be done..." because we are all on the road somewhere between a perfect community, a perfect home, where our hearts rests in God; between that home, as I say, and between not being at home, in fact feeling far from home (these times come to us in life—a death, job loss, health crisis, or even a time when we don't understand God or our faith anymore), in those times we wander.

When that happens to you, remember that there is a home at ALC; people here who have gone through much and who have come to trust Jesus and with whom you can talk. Your parents are part of that home.

Remember, too, that you can trust in Jesus, talk to Jesus, and then listen to your own mind and heart.

Life and faith is as much about asking questions than finding the answers. Remember that the famous poem Rilke said:

...I would like to beg you dear Sir, as well as I can, to have patience with everything unresolved in your heart and to try to love the questions themselves as if they were locked rooms or books written in a very foreign language. Don't search for the answers, which could not be given to you now, because you would not be able to live them. And the point is to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer.

Rainer Maria Rilke, 1903  
in Letters to a Young Poet

WE are proud of you. We have helped make you who you are!

So, we say: be brave in helping to make the world into the kingdom of God. Continue to be angry against injustice.

Wise. Continue to think.

Patient with yourself and others. You'll have times of anxiety, boredom, temptation, loneliness. But search for the truth, mystery, and wonder of life.

Loving, for following God's love requires you to give more, love more, and live more than you can imagine.

Be active, exercise, love your bodies as temples of the Spirit.

Seek beauty, truth, goodness.  
Continue to be Funny  
Questioning  
And creative; follow your call (your bliss)  
Be yourselves.

Amen.