

O Taste and See
Rev. Nicole Farley
First Presbyterian Church of Waukesha
October 28, 2012

Hebrews 7:23-28

²³ Furthermore, the former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office; ²⁴but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues for ever.

²⁵Consequently he is able for all time to save those who approach God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

²⁶ For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, blameless, undefiled, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. ²⁷Unlike the other high priests, he has no need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for those of the people; this he did once for all when he offered himself. ²⁸For the law appoints as high priests those who are subject to weakness, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect for ever.

Psalm 34:1-8, 19-22

¹ I will bless the Lord at all times;
his praise shall continually be in my mouth.

² My soul makes its boast in the Lord;
let the humble hear and be glad.

³ O magnify the Lord with me,
and let us exalt his name together.

⁴ I sought the Lord, and he answered me,
and delivered me from all my fears.

⁵ Look to him, and be radiant;
so your faces shall never be ashamed.

⁶ This poor soul cried, and was heard by the Lord,
and was saved from every trouble.

⁷ The angel of the Lord encamps
around those who fear him, and delivers them.

⁸ O taste and see that the Lord is good;
happy are those who take refuge in him.

¹⁹ Many are the afflictions of the righteous,
but the Lord rescues them from them all.

²⁰ He keeps all their bones;
not one of them will be broken.

²¹ Evil brings death to the wicked,
and those who hate the righteous will be condemned.

²² The Lord redeems the life of his servants;
none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned.

Today, as you may have noticed on the cover of your bulletin, is Reformation Sunday. For those of you from backgrounds non-Protestant, I offer a brief history lesson. Although we look to John Calvin as the founder of our denomination, we must remember Martin Luther who came first. On October 31, 1517, 495 years ago, Martin Luther posted his 95 Theses, or Disputation on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences, on the doors of the church in Wittenberg, Germany. These 95 Theses outlined the ways in

which he believed the church had strayed from the original commission of Christ. John Calvin found his own areas of disagreement and later published his commentary in a series of writings which, collected, are known as *The Institutes*.

Others found their own discomforts and disagreements and so, as my church history professor Ken Sawyer advised, it is more right to speak of the reformations (plural) of the 16th century. One of the many early changes was around communion. Where the priest once, with his back turned to the congregation, spoke words in Latin over the bread and the cup, and then only offered the bread to the people, the reformations renewed the opportunities to truly **taste** and **see**. The bread is lifted high so that all might see it broken; in the same way, the cup is poured so that all might hear as it is poured out. And all are asked to take the bread **and** the cup that all might taste.

Change did not stop in the 1500's. It was ongoing before the noted reformations and it continued after. Author Phyllis Tickle refers to the church having a giant rummage sale every 500 years¹, where old, sometimes incorrect, styles, approaches, understanding, and thoughts - really, ways of being church - are put aside for newer and, hopefully, improved ones in an effort to return to being "radically Jesus-oriented." We do this because we remember, as Tickle says, "He meant what he said."²

Two thousand years ago Christ came and, among other things, the legalistic nature of faith changed. About 500 years after Christ, Rome fell and Constantine revolutionized the faith by declaring it the official faith of his empire. Five hundred years later the church split over the place of the Holy Spirit in the Trinity, resulting in the formation of the Orthodox Christian church. Five hundred years after that came the reformations of which I mentioned. Guess what? It's been another five hundred years, give or take. Whether we can say definitively if the church is going to emerge in some dramatically new way is yet to be determined but we cannot deny that we are being presented with opportunities and reasons to consider whether it is time.

Even if it's not true - that we might be changing dramatically - that doesn't mean we aren't due for a wake-up call, that we aren't due to reconsider that Jesus meant what he said. What the reformations in these five-hundred-year cycles have prompted are returns to the heart of the gospel message - love the Lord your God, love your neighbors as yourself, go and make disciples of all the nations, honor the Sabbath, share the good news. I give thanks to you all for your permission, and expectation, that I participate in study leave. While I am still processing all I heard and experienced this past week at the Wee Kirk Conference, I can say without a doubt that something one of the speakers said is another prompt for reformation, for re-formation, for taking what is already there, what has maybe lost its shape

¹ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LY83MF2HZcU>

² Ibid.

or definition, what has gotten sloppy or lost, and re-forming it into a shape more pleasing. Rev. Ray Jones is the Coordinator for Evangelism for the Presbyterian Church (USA) and what he offered for himself and for all of us gathered was a spiritual plan. And now, I offer it to you.

He says our spiritual plans should be sure to include:

- Silence
- Sabbath: daily, weekly, and (*not* or) monthly
- Daily time in Scripture
- Daily time in prayer
- Accountability
- Sharing / serving

You may be thinking, “Well, sure, I could improve in these areas but when can I fit it in? I have to get the car fixed and go to the doctor and I hardly have time to see my family and those flurries this morning reminded me I need to switch my closet to my winter clothes and the cat is sick and I need to get someone out to look at the furnace and my neighbor’s leaves have all blown onto my lawn and I’m sure *he’s* not coming to rake them and I’m not sure how I’m going to juggle the bills I have this month with the money I have and I’m scared by what the doctor said at my last visit. How can I make time for God when God isn’t making it easier to make time?”

But who are we to believe we should be without affliction? And who are we to think that affliction should get in the way of our relationship with God? God in human form was afflicted, and how! People sought to kill him as an infant, he was constantly overworked, finding it difficult to get away for rest without people interrupting him, he was grossly misunderstood, even by those who knew him best, he was falsely accused, he was regularly challenged by those around him, he was threatened, people sought to kill him as an adult until they succeeded. He didn’t know where he would find his next meal, he was cleaning up the messes of others, he was worried about those he knew most closely and those he’d never met. And still he was holy, blameless, undefiled, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. He was perfect - unbroken yet in our broken form. He offered his life to us as an example that we might know how to live and he offered his life to death that we might know how to live freed by forgiveness for all our broken ways.

The example of his life looked like Ray Jones’ spiritual plan; the example of his life looked like Psalm 34. “I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul makes its boast in the Lord; let the humble hear and be glad. O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together.” Perhaps you’re thinking you could follow this example from the beginning of Psalm 34 – praise God more, talk about the ways God has changed your life, worship God here among

others.

But what about the next part? “I sought the Lord, and he answered me, and delivered me from all my fears... This poor soul cried, and was heard by the Lord, and was saved from every trouble.” I pray and yet I still have fears and troubles. How can I buy into this? How can I believe this psalm still applies to me? Remember this: “Then he withdrew from them about a stone’s throw, knelt down, and prayed, ‘Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done.’”³ Jesus, too, had both fears and troubles and we know that God did not take the cup from him, did not offer a way out of the promise of salvation through death on the cross. So if this word is not true for Christ, how can it ever be true for us? Either God is not true or our understanding is not true.

Listen again: “I sought the Lord, and he answered me, and delivered me from all my fears... This poor soul cried, and was heard by the Lord, and was saved from every trouble.” Nowhere does it say that God eliminated the fears or the troubles. If we take comfort in God, if we trust in God, if we rely on God, if we believe that God will indeed care for us more than the birds of the air or the lilies of the field,⁴ how can we still fear? What hold can our troubles have?

Then, if we seek the Lord, if we cry out, if we take refuge in the Lord, we could taste and see how good the Lord is and be happy. If we are silent, if we honor the Sabbath daily, weekly, and monthly, we could taste and see how good the Lord is and be happy. If we spend daily time in both Scripture and prayer, we could taste and see how good the Lord is and be happy. If we ask and allow others to hold us accountable in our faith and, out of that faith, we share and we serve, we could taste and see how good the Lord is and be happy. It’s time. It’s time to remember again that Jesus meant what he said. It’s time. It’s time to taste and see that the Lord *is* good.

Let us pray: God, we cry out and we seek you. Deliver us from our fears and save us from our troubles, we pray. We lean to you, we rely on you, we take refuge in you today. Amen.

³ Luke 22:41-42

⁴ Matthew 6