

Chris Murphy

October 27, 2024

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 13: 11-13

Sermon Title: Live In Peace

Prayer...

Introduction:

Today on this Reformation Sunday I want to remind us of some key wisdom from the Reformed tradition within Christian history. Every once in awhile, I want to remind you of our denomination, the Presbyterian Church USA and some of our heritage. The Presbyterian church roots go back to the Church of Scotland and the Church of Scotland was started by John Knox, who was a student of John Calvin. John Calvin was the major leader of the second generation of the Protestant Reformation after Martin Luther.

When I was in seminary back in the late 1990's and early 2000's, I was required to take various classes to prepare to be a presbyterian

pastor. I was also required to pass five ordination exams. We needed to be steeped in reformed theology or the key ideas about God and Christian faith taught historically within the reformed tradition. This morning I will share five of the key ideas or tenants of reformed Christian faith that I find especially helpful as we learn to live in peace. These five beliefs remind us that we can find peace through our loving God. The five areas are:

1. The Sovereignty of God.
2. The Centrality of Christ.
3. The Holy Trinity.
4. The Gift of Grace.
5. The Authority of Scripture

Also, before I start I want to remind you that other Christians traditions have taught these ideas, but within the reformed tradition they are especially emphasized.

The first idea I wish to highlight is the sovereignty of God.

What does it mean that God is sovereign?

The Sovereignty of God refers to God's ultimate control of the world and our lives. For the reformers like John Calvin and John Knox, it was important to understand that God is big and all powerful. The reason this was a positive is that even in difficult circumstances people could find hope that God would ultimately overcome evil and bring hope and life. The understanding that the loving hand of God was guiding the world brought great comfort.

Charles Spurgeon, a well known theologian of the 19th century once said.

When you go through a trial the sovereignty of God is a pillow in which you rest your head.

I agree with Spurgeon that knowing God is sovereign allows me to trust that God will ultimately triumph in this life and bring healing and wholeness in the world even though I do not always understand why things happen. Trusting in God's sovereignty does not mean

that we always understand the ways of God, nor for me does it mean that there is not also free will, but what it does mean is that in some mysterious way God has the power to bring good out of very difficult circumstances and that God can carry us through suffering and potentially bring redemption and healing.

God is sovereign refers to God being all powerful or omnipotent. It also relates to the idea that God is everywhere or omnipresent, and that God is all knowing or omniscient. Knowing the power and depth of God is able to bring us peace when we can find comfort in knowing that God holds the mysteries of this world and we do not need to carry that weight on our own shoulders.

A second reformed idea is the Centrality of Christ.

For reformers, the story of Scripture and the purpose of the church centers on the person and Lordship of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the full revelation of God. Christ is also our only mediator to God our Creator and Jesus Christ is God. The emphasis on the centrality of

Christ reminds Christians to center their faith on a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and to look to the Gospels as the key focus of Scripture even as we value all of Scripture. Jesus is central because he is the Savior of the world. As we have discussed the last few weeks, having Christ be central to our faith brings peace because Jesus is the prince of peace who offers peace to his followers. Knowing Jesus intimately is knowing peace.

A third idea within reformed thought is the Trinity. Many Christian traditions highlight the trinity but the reformed tradition through various creeds and catechisms included teaching on the trinity a central part of good discipleship. The trinity as we know refers to God as three in one, Father/Son/Holy Spirit. God is one essence in three persons. This is a great mystery. Legend has it that Saint Patrick used to use a three leaf clover or shamrock to describe the trinity. As a teenager, I learned the example of the trinity being like water, which comes in the form of ice, liquid, or air. Another helpful

metaphor may be to compare the Trinity to being like a person's finger, which is one finger but includes three sections. At our church we talk about trinity as God as Creator or loving Mother and Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The benefit of the Trinity is that by caring about the three parts of the trinity we can learn all the different characteristics, roles, and qualities of God. Finding intimacy with the trinity through prayer enables us to have a close relationship with God and to understand the profound mystery that God is one community. We get to join the dance of the trinity as we grow in relationship together. Through close relationship with the trinity we find peace and wholeness.

A fourth idea of reformed thought is the gift of grace. Growing up Presbyterian I can tell you that the most important word that I heard over and over again was grace. Grace emphasized that it was God's loving power that could change a life and that nothing we did for God

could earn God's love. What Jesus did during his life, death, and resurrection was a pure gift of grace. Grace also spoke to the power of forgiveness, how even a person that does terrible things can be dramatically changed by God and that sins can truly be forgiven so that followers of Jesus can have a clean slate and a fresh start.

Grace also means that is okay to not be okay, that the church when it is truly being the church is able to be a safe place of vulnerable individuals who all benefit from God's grace, hope, peace, and love.

Grace is my favorite word because it speaks of the unconditional love of God and the freedom we have to be human and not perfect.

The Protestant Reformation highlighted the Latin phrase *solo gratis* or grace alone to emphasize that we are saved by grace not by works.

Grace helps us avoid perfectionism and allows us to more fully rest in God's love of us even when we struggle.

The last reformed idea that I wish to mention is the authority of Scripture. The Protestant Reformers were clear that Scripture was to be the authority for understanding God and the teachings of God.

The reformers were concerned that the Catholic Church put too much power in Christian tradition and the leadership of Popes or other ecclesial authority.

The Protestant Reformation was occurring near the time of the printing press, so eventually it became possible for many people to own bibles and interpret the bible for themselves even as they also were taught by pastors. This freedom to study Scripture led to more lay people growing in faith.

In my own life, the Bible has been a central way for me to develop my relationship with God. The Bible is filled with wise teaching that have shaped my values and helped me cultivate a personal relationship with God.

The most important aspect of the Bible is that through it I have come to know the story of Jesus Christ, who is my personal Lord and Savior. Sometimes I wonder what I would know of Jesus without the Bible. The answer is that I do not think I would know much. Not knowing Jesus would be very sad to me. I am sure you feel the same. I realize that there are parts of the Bible that are hard to understand but let us remember that the beauty of the Bible is that it contains the story of salvation and the great wisdom of Jesus.

I hope looking at these five areas of reformed faith is helpful as we celebrate Reformation Sunday. I find peace in remembering that God is sovereign, the centrality of Christ, the Holy Trinity, the gift of grace, and the authority of Scripture. All of these areas deserve their own sermons, but looking at them together helps us see the gift of the reformed tradition more fully. In the end, these ideas hopefully open our hearts to a deeper experience of God's love, so that we

may more effectively show God's love and Shalom to a world in need.

As 2 Corinthians 13: 11-13 teaches us, we are invited to embrace the truth that the God of love and peace is with us and we live in peace together and seek to be peacemakers in our world.

Praise Be to God.

AMEN.

2 Corinthians 13:11-13

11 Finally, brothers and sisters, farewell. Be restored; listen to my appeal; agree with one another; live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. 12 Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you.

13 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.