

Reformation Sunday - a time to celebrate our history, our birth as a Protestants.

So - quick history lesson, and it will be on the test!

The late Jack Rogers, a Presbyterian scholar, identifies three different waves of the Reformation, each with its own unique personality.

The first wave he calls the "modest" wave. It was begun by Martin Luther in Germany. Luther, and his later followers, wanted to change only those things they believed the church was doing that contradicted Scripture. Luther never intended to split the Catholic Church.

And so Rogers calls this the modest wave of the Reformation. The Lutherans and the Anglicans or Episcopalians trace their heritage to this first, modest wave of the Reformation.

Rogers calls the second wave of the Reformation the "moderate" wave.

This second wave of the Reformation was centered in Switzerland and later spread to England and Scotland, and John Calvin is usually seen as the leader of this movement. This is where we trace our heritage as Presbyterians.

Rogers calls the third wave the "radical" wave. Some Christians thought that Calvin and the Reformed churches did not go far enough. These Christians often emphasized the importance of a personal profession of faith, and so they would not baptize infants.

These churches tended to be separatists. They thought that the church should withdraw from a corrupt culture and form an alternative community. Groups like the Amish and the Mennonites, and the Baptists trace their roots to this third wave of the Reformation.

But Reformation Sunday is more than a simple celebration of history – it is for us to be about the gospel business of making history.

So I want to go a little further to consider a few of the distinctive theological chromosomes that identify us as members of the family of faith community known as Protestants.

As Presbyterians - with all Protestants, we stand alone together.

The Protestant motto, watchword, catchphrase is this: Scripture alone, Faith alone, Grace alone, – that's what I mean when I say we stand alone.

But to this, we add the idea of the Priesthood of All Believers – so as Protestants, we stand alone together.

We stand on 'Scripture alone'

The Protestant principle of 'Scripture alone' means that the Bible is the source and authority for our faith and life as Christians.

Fred Craddock, the great preacher, told of a visit he made to a woman in his church who was facing major surgery. She had never been in a hospital before.

He walked in and found her crying. She asked him to pray with her and he did. And he noticed beside her bed a stack of books and magazines, *People, Glamour, US*, stories about celebrities, movie stars.

Craddock said he thought, "There's not a calorie in that whole stack to help her through her experience. She had no place to dip down into a reservoir and come up with something – a word, a phrase, a thought, an idea, a memory, a person. Just empty."

I believe that one of the great tragedies of Protestant churches in the past fifty years has

been our loss of Biblical knowledge and with it, an inability to assess and address the changes in our world – our culture – our society – like we're running on empty!

At the heart of our life as Protestants is to listen for the voice of God, which can be heard, yes, in nature; yes, in that "still, small voice of conscience"; and yes, through the doctrines of the church, but only because we have listened to and heard God's word in scripture.

We stand on 'scripture alone' and **we stand on 'faith alone'** – we stand on the certainty that the power of God is at work in Jesus Christ for you and me – the power of God for our salvation, the word God speaks to us forgiven sinners - we hear it by faith and faith is how we ought to live as disciples of Christ!

Martin Luther saw that we are saved by faith alone and we live by that faith – faith is the power that moves us to trust God, to have confidence in God, to give us the assurance that God's grace is for us so that we can do the will of God here on earth, without fear!

More than "I believe", faith is a matter of "I trust" - like the group building exercise where you fall backward into the arms of a group behind you...I can believe they are there all day long, but until I trust that they will catch me, I will not go.

So with God, to trust God and take that step into the future with a God who makes all things new!

As Protestants, **we stand on 'scripture alone', 'faith alone, and we stand on 'grace alone'** – there is nothing in us or about us that deserves God's grace – grace is a free gift.

A man goes to a doctor complaining of a constant headache...The doctor asks: "All the lists of don'ts"...The man says: "Of course I don't – a God-fearing Calvinist!"...The doctor says, "Your halo is on too tight!!"

'Grace alone' means we see ourselves as forgiven sinners - reconciled to God not by what we have done, but by what Jesus has done for you and me.

We stand alone on grace, on faith, on scripture; but standing alone doesn't mean we stand by ourselves.

We stand together as the Priesthood of All Believers.

I like the way Beth Pyles, a Presbyterian minister in the mountains of western Virginia, puts it – she says that our gathering together – coming together for worship and work, the actual being of a community, we understand it as the very source of our life, as when Jesus promises to be there whenever two or more gather in his name.

But not just this place, not just these believers - Think about it this way - I go to church (here), so that we can be church - here, there, everywhere!

In other words - when those churches burned in South Carolina a couple of years ago: we should feel the heat and smell the smoke.

The Priesthood of All Believers comes to life when each one of us as a believer stands together with other believers for Christ in Christ with Christ.

In seminary, each student had to give a sermon in chapel during our third and last year. The only sermon I remember beside mine was from my classmate Mike Fleenor.

What he said was that whenever we put an adjective in front of Christian to describe us – such as 'conservative' Christian, 'liberal' Christian, 'progressive' or 'evangelical' or any other adjective, we have placed something created by humans to define Christianity.

In other words, an idol of our making, a Priesthood of "us but not them" Believers!

No, we are a Priesthood of ALL Believers.

Look again at our story of the early church in our reading from the Acts of the Apostles:

First - we see **all** sharing – it's such a fundamental of life – it's one of the first things we teach children when they play with others: well knowing that sharing is not only for the benefit of the one receiving, but also for the one giving.

Generosity – **all** of them enjoyed a spirit of giving which is as important as the actual giving itself; and generosity shows up as joy! Joy to the world is not just a Christmas gift song – it's the song we sing all year because of the gift God has given at Christmas!

Commitment and perseverance – **all** of them sticking to it, keeping the flame going, are crucial not only for each one of us, but also for the entire community.

This church is here because so many people have been committed to the cause of Christ, have persevered through many difficult days – this is not the time to give up, to give in, to walk away – Commitment and perseverance are part of the foundation of this great church!

Like I said, Reformation Sunday is more than a simple celebration of history – You and I are here today because some ordinary men and women in Jerusalem some 2,000 years ago, some ordinary men and women in Europe some 500 years ago, and those men and women in Athens some 200 years ago who established this church - riding a wave of reformation to change the world in the name of Jesus Christ.

By grace, by faith, by the word of God – and now is our time to stand together to be about the gospel business of making history!

TO GOD BE THE GLORY!