

Holy Spirit, move among us. Help us to hear your word, to understand, to live it out, and to share it with others. In Jesus' name, Amen.

My favorite liturgical color is red.

Many of you already knew this about me.

But allow me to explain.

Fair warning – this is going to get a little bit church nerdy for a minute.

Each season and festival in the church year has an assigned color. That color is used for the paraments, which means the cloths on the altar and pulpit and the stoles that the pastors wear, and sometimes other decorations in the church building. If you have seen pastors wearing chasubles or copes or other fancy colorful robes, those match the seasonal color too.

Each liturgical color ends up having a different meaning.

White or gold mean Jesus and resurrection. Christmas and Easter are white or gold, as is All Saints' Sunday, which we'll celebrate next week. Christ the King and Transfiguration also use white – basically, any time we're celebrating Jesus or resurrection, white and gold are the colors to use!

In Lent, while we are preparing for Good Friday through a season of repentance and refocusing on God, the color is purple. So purple is for penitence.

Advent is blue. This might be new to you, if you grew up in a church that used purple for Advent. But Advent is for anticipation, not repentance. So purple is used in Lent – only – and blue is the color used for Advent, the season of waiting and anticipating the birth of our savior.

Green is for ordinary time. Really. That's what the church calls the long season that stretches through the summer and into the fall, when there are no major church festivals or holidays. It's also called the season after Pentecost, since that was the most recent major church festival... about 23 weeks ago.

Green is used for the in-between times, for those days that don't celebrate anything in particular except another wonderful morning to remember our relationship with God.

White, gold, purple, blue, green. The other liturgical color is red.

Red is the color of the Holy Spirit. Red is used on Pentecost and to celebrate saints and martyrs. The color red is reminiscent of the blood of the martyrs, and also of the flames that appeared on the heads of the disciples at Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was poured out on them.

And red is used on Reformation Sunday.

Once a year, Lutherans and other Protestants remember the courage of those faithful people who stood up to the church in their day and took a stand *for* the Holy Spirit, and *against* the institution of established religion.

This means that Reformation Day is a Holy Spirit holiday – it’s a time for us to remember that God continues to move among us, to inspire people, to work for change, and to teach us new things.

Some people treat Reformation Sunday solely as a time to celebrate the European reformers, generally dead white guys who popularized a particular way of interpreting Scripture. To confine Reformation Sunday to history, I think, is to do it a serious injustice.

The point of the Protestant Reformation is to acknowledge that God’s revelation to humankind didn’t stop with the biblical book of Revelation. The Holy Spirit has broken the barrier between human and divine, and continues to do so!

We don’t call this day “Lutheran history celebration” or “1517 revisited” or “feast of the 95 theses.”

We call this day *Reformation Sunday* because the church continues to be formed and changed and formed again when we pay attention to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Lutheranism isn’t about commemorating a particular day in the 1500s when some German law student who was afraid of dying in a thunderstorm promised God he’d become a monk if only he made it through the storm.

Lutheranism isn’t about a German priest posting 95 complaints about the church in his day on a public bulletin board, that happened to double as a church door.

Lutheranism isn’t about a priest being excommunicated for his insistence that the pope isn’t the only one who can rightly interpret Scripture.

All those stories are from Martin Luther’s life – in case you didn’t know.

Lutheranism *isn’t* about continually exalting our northern European ancestors in the faith, who joined the Reformation either by royal edict or moral conviction, and then proceeded to tie cultural practices to their theological beliefs.

Lutheranism really isn’t primarily about Martin Luther, or about Germans or Norwegians or Swedes, or Jell-O, or even lefse.

Lutheranism is about the Holy Spirit.

That's why the altar and the pulpit and the pastor wear red today.

The Reformation *is* about seeing the activity of God in the world around us – in every culture, in every language, in everyday people – and not just in the priests and professors who make it their life's work to study religion.

The Holy Spirit can speak just as clearly through you as through the pope. *That is* what the Reformation was about.

From a thunderstorm 500 years ago, to letters and papers from a Birmingham jail, Reformation Day proclaims that there's a sweet, sweet Spirit in *this place!*

We lean on the everlasting arms of the mighty fortress that is our God, singing with a blessed assurance that Jesus loves you and me!

Through music and writing, rainbows and thunderstorms, protests and worshipping congregations – God is not done with us yet.

The Holy Spirit still has something to tell us about how to know God and how to live in community with one another.

The current capital campaign for the ELCA is called "Always Being Made New." *That* is what it means to be a church of the Reformation – we believe that God still has more to teach us. Beyond the Scriptures and the witness of the church, the Holy Spirit can speak directly to each and every one of us. God is constantly re-forming the church and making it in to something new!

Consider today's Gospel story. What would have happened if Zaccheaus had believed that God didn't speak to humankind any more – that the Scriptures were there, and no additional relationship with God was needed?

He would never have climbed that tree, Jesus would never have seen him, he would never have become the example that he is for us today, and – perhaps most important of all – we would not have that catchy Sunday School song that nearly everyone here could probably still sing by memory!

Zaccheaus was willing to meet Jesus, to welcome him into his home, and to learn something from him about the nature of God, even when it made him uncomfortable.

Our call, as people of a re-forming church, is to be willing to meet God, to welcome the Spirit into our homes, and to learn new things about the nature of God, even when it makes us uncomfortable.

Reform can be a loaded word in today's society.

Education reform	Healthcare reform
Voting reform	Political reform

As Lutherans, we are asked to *always* reform, to continue reshaping every aspect of our lives. We can't get settled in to "the way it's always been" – that is the least Lutheran thing imaginable! The Holy Spirit is alive and well, and still speaking to us in new and exciting ways! Every time we learn new information or receive new revelation from God, our Lutheran duty and our responsible response is to reform what we believe and incorporate what is new into an ever-expanding understanding of the world.

All those social reform ideas – they're important! Nothing should ever be so established that it is unquestionable.

That is the lesson of Reformation Sunday. Nothing – not even our relationship with God – especially not our relationship with the church – nothing should ever be so established that it is unquestionable.

Ask questions! Challenge the status quo! Look for new ways of understanding the world! That is what Martin Luther did.

It got him kicked out of the Roman Catholic Church, but it also opened up a whole new way of seeing the world.

Thanks to Luther, we now allow all worshippers to receive bread and wine at Communion, not just the priests. Everyone is encouraged to read the Bible, in their own language and not in Latin, and discern how to apply it to their lives.

These are reforms that came eventually not just to the church that Luther instigated, but also to the Catholic Church. While Luther may have been excommunicated for his ideas, eventually even the church that defrocked him came to understand the importance of reform.

If we truly do believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life, who is worshipped and glorified alongside the Father and Son – if we believe that the Spirit has spoken through the prophets and the church – then we must believe that the Spirit continues to speak.

And we must continue to listen and respond.

That is what Reformation Sunday is all about.

That is what it means to be Lutheran.

That is what it means to be Christian.

If God can give a special revelation to some student in Germany in the 1500s, then why not also to you and to me?

Thanks be to God. Amen.