

Sunday, October 31, 2021

Psalm 90 Romans 3:19-28 Deuteronomy 34:1-12

Are We there Yet?

In this second right now- just think about how many messages are being shared between two people. Then reflect on how many messages are then forwarded on to a second, third person or more individuals through the different types of social media. This phrase social media was accepted in 2004 as the different forms of electronic communication (such as websites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (such as videos). What would we do without it? Or what did we do before it came about and how did messages get shared efficiently and quickly?

The key phrase is quickly and efficiently for now we want to know right away as it happens and often what we eat for supper is posted before we eat it, just in case somebody wants to know! But of all these billions of messages being shared is what is posted and shared really important?

There was a young family, who in the days before ipads, phones, and screens on the rooves of cars, were travelling to visit family for a vacation. It was to be a long drive to get to their destination and so within just 30 minutes one of the children asks the driver, "Are we there yet?". What did this child want to know? Whether they had arrived at the destination because in their minds the journey was slow. What they were looking forward to was getting to their destination. The answer of course was "no," but one of the parents wisely said, 'we'll get there in a little while after you have a sleep tonight then when you wake up in the morning, we will be there. The next problem was that the concept of being in the car for the whole day and so to pass the time games were played. However, it seemed that about every 30- to 40 minutes, this same child asked, 'Are we there yet?'" Maybe this is why people today use social media while in vehicles to entertain their children! "Are we there yet?" might also imply that they are anxious or impatient for what is to come.

This is Reformation Day 2021; 504 years ago a monk, Martin Luther, posted 95 Theses on the door of the church in Wittenberg, Germany, which outlined the difference he found between the established church and the Bible. This was because the key leader of the church (pope) of the time sought to raise funds to build a new basilica and to do this, the people sold what was known as indulgences or pardons. People could purchase these promises for their deceased loved ones and this is what Luther to post his ideas. These theses were written in Latin and were intended for discussion among the scholars and monks in the university but many friends of Luther made copies of the theses on the newly-invented printing press, and they spread across Europe in a matter of months. Luther had gained many followers for his ideas, which had been translated for all to read.

Luther's teachings focused on the promises of scripture, emphasizing that the Spirit works in our hearts to speak God's word to us and that we receive God's grace through our faith in Christ. Our life in the Body of Christ= his church, is shaped by this gift of freedom. The passage we read from Romans 3, to Luther was the heart of the gospel: All people fall short in their relationship with God. But, God offers us forgiveness of sins through Jesus. We are justified, that is, put right with God, by the gift of God's grace, through faith in Jesus.

Luther was tried, his teaching was condemned, and he was convicted by the immorality of his writings. He was excommunicated! He hid in the Wartburg Castle in Eisenach, but did not sit idle during that time because he translated the New Testament into German. Eventually, Luther published his German Bible translation, and it quickly became a bestseller, and a model for other translations. This was the first time a controversy had spread with the help of a printing press! A printed form of communication was now in the hands of people. Change was on the horizon! A new journey was now beginning as the Reformation took hold in many part of Europe using Luther's writings as foundational. People like John Calvin and Katharina Zell living in France, Ulrich Zwingli in Switzerland, John Knox in Scotland, Thomas Cranmer in England and Argula Von Grumbach of Bavaria spoke about change and reform for the church. And in these intervening 500+ years the role of the church and its focused teaching on God's grace and studying of scripture has continued to influence modern theologians and believers and alike.

Our reading from Deuteronomy, comes at the end of a long journey. God promised Moses and the Israelites that they would move from slavery into freedom in a Promised Land. However, this journey lasted over 40 years and one can only imagine how many times Moses was asked, "Are we there yet?" But, Moses was patient and he endured the journey knowing that each day God revealed himself to them in new ways, that their faith story would be part of the history of faithful generations to come. Eventually Moses arrives at the border and God tells him to climb to the mountaintop so that he may see the vastness of the country. The journey from slavery to freedom is just over the hill, but Moses does not live for this. The people had arrived in the Promised Land, that long journey ended, but he dies. His destination is not the Promised Land, but in heaven with God.

As we think about these past 504 years since Luther wrote his thoughts down and put them on the church door, it would never have occurred to him that the church as we know it today would be so different in practise but remain theologically sound, upholding Christ's teachings through the various avenues of social media. From the printing press to Facebook, the message is the out for all to hear. And the journey or purpose of the church in making disciples is not finished by any means. About every 500 years or so, the church undergoes a major reconfiguration of purpose, thought and direction, but what remains constant is that we are saved by Christ Jesus, and that God's grace is received and made known to us and others.

As a church we are going through change and transition and have been for many years. The pandemic has caused us to use technology to tell others Christ's message, but one thing is

certain, we as a church have not yet fully arrived at the destination or moment of fulfillment of our purpose.

Our destination as a church is to make disciples, to baptize all peoples in the name of God- Father Son and Spirit. Yet the full destination is always out of our grasp. There is a constant temptation for us to see that 'we've arrived' at what God has placed in our hearts to be and become, but in reality there is still one more person who needs to hear the Good News. There is still another person who needs to experience Christ's love, and yet another person who has not felt within God's Spirit softening them and moving them to serve Christ in a new way.

But we must continue to move forward- to reach out using the tools made available for us- whether it is in livestreaming worship; welcoming people to the church property for fun activities or even for food and friendship. We need to continue to share the message that God's love endures, and will never fail us. We need to share the new things God has done and continues to do and to focus our ministry on Jesus Christ who died and rose again for our sakes. We need to believe that God's truth will abide, and God's kingdom will be for evermore.

So Are we as a church there yet?—there is not clear, but we are definitely on a journey of faith together; We are heading in the direction of a new thing led by God in this post pandemic world of 2021-2022. We are Christ's disciples and the teachings of the Bible will continue to guide us as we seek to grow in faith as a church and as individuals.

We need to realize again, that it is by faith alone, that we are forgiven and offered hope. It is through faith that God calls us to new a new land —where people connect not only face to face in person, but through the world of electronics and changing times. We as a church need to know who God is for ourselves so that our relationship with God is faithful and true. Just like Martin Luther who believed in Christ Jesus and that by faith, we are forgiven and able to begin life anew.

We need to acknowledge that Christ will lead us so that we may lead others; that Christ will teach us so that we may teach others and that God's love will fill us and guide our daily lives. This is how we know that we are on the journey of life in Christ's care. We aren't there yet but the journey is not as clear as the destination. For by faith our destination is in Christ's embrace when He calls us home. Meanwhile let us continue to walk with Christ in faith and with hope. God is calling you; how do you respond?

Let us pray

God of grace, hear our prayers as we renew our faith in you. We thank you for the people who went before us, who shared their knowledge and understanding of your Word and with conviction brought change and hope to all people. Bless us O God as we share and renew our faith—as we sing with hope. Amen.