Reformation Sunday – Confirmation – Affirmation of Baptism
October 30, 2011
Pastor Eric Wester

Today is filled with energy, excitement, expectation among us.

It is a day to celebrate the living Spirit of the living God in our midst and in our hearts....now.

This energy, excitement, expectation is symbolized around us in many ways:

- For our eyes, we have the bright red paraments which remind us of the fire of God’s Spirit at Pentecost.
- We see the extra candles which hold up the light to a world that creeps closer to darkness—literally with the shortening of days and figuratively with new ways we undo one another. The light of Christ helps us find our way.
- For our ears we have the beautiful music and words of our hymns, of the choirs and other special music, and the clear message of the readings from Scripture.
- Perhaps you’ll catch a whiff of the fresh cut flowers which grace our church or taste the bread and drink from the cup to taste the promises of God.
- And for our hearts, today (at the 11:00 am service) we celebrate the rite of Confirmation, when three young people make an affirmation of their baptism into Christ.

With all of these, we literally see, hear, sing, smell, taste, and celebrate the actions of God who calls believers, gathers us together as the church, enlightens us with His Word, and sanctifies us to live with the law of love in our hearts.

All of these point to and capture aspects of the energy, excitement, and expectation of Reformation Day, 2011.

The Spirit of Christ was at work as Martin Luther brought in the fresh light and air of a reformation to the medieval church. The Spirit of Christ is at work now, the renewing of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church as we take the next steps forward building on 75 years of dedicated service in Alexandria. And the Spirit of Christ will be alive as we journey into the next generation of believers—youth who make such a difference right here in our midst.

In the Lutheran church, we observe this day as an occasion to celebrate the on-going life of Christ Jesus in the church. In more than one place in Holy Scripture, there is a story of God doing something new:

- a new birth,
- new life
- new land,
- a new city,
- a new commandment.

Today, in Jeremiah, God promises a new covenant.
And the new covenant is not so new in terms of what God does – God seems to always be calling His people to live according to God’s plans and the desires of God’s heart. What is new about this covenant is that it is written in our hearts.

The old covenant – originally written on stone tablets and scrolls of paper, will be replaced by the new covenant, written on flesh. The first set of stone tablets and given to Moses on Mount Sinai was broken. The second set was written again and hidden away inside the Ark of the Covenant and then in the temple in Jerusalem.

Later, the book of the law, containing the application of the commandments, was written on scrolls and stored beside the ark. Unfortunately….and predictably….such religious tokens were mostly forgotten. People got busy with life and then these treasures were rediscovered at a time of trial and difficulty.

This is the time when Jeremiah enters the picture, announcing that our connection with God is to be etched...not on stone nor written on scrolls...not even printed in books or sent around on digital tablets.

Our connection with God is etched on our hearts – we carry with us an awareness that our life in God is, for us, the connection we have with eternal life.

In Martin Luther’s day, our Christian church veered off into a similar difficulty. The church made religion into a system of exchange – forgiveness from God traded for a price – repentance measured by money. True repentance, as Luther understood Jesus and the words of Scripture, is our humble and heartfelt awareness of sin. God forgives, not because we do something for God, but because God is the source of all mercy, peace, and hope.

Today is a day for matters of the heart. Most importantly, it a day to turn to God that we may reconnect with the heart of God.

In some ways, the life we have in God can seem remote or hard to pursue….and in a way that is exactly the point. We need no longer pursue God -- and here’s why -- God has come to us:

- God writes on our hearts as a way to speak to our hearts.
- God comes to us in Jesus, to share our human experiences, and lift us to heavenly hopes.
- God sends the breath of the Spirit that we might find rest for our souls by taking time to rest in God.
- God connects to us in Word and Sacrament -- bringing both judgment and forgiveness....adoption and nourishment in our life of faith.
- God joins us into Christ by making us part of the living body of Christ.

In numerous places in the Bible, the church is referred to as the body of Christ. It is high praise and a high calling to understand the gathering of people in the name of Jesus as truly the body of Christ.

When Martin Luther looked out over his congregation in the early 1500s, he saw the body of Christ – farmers, merchants, students, craftsmen – of many different human talents, yet all part of the living body of Christ.

You and I today, as part of this wonderful, mysterious, and unfolding promise, can look around to see each other. We are people of different ages and backgrounds. We have different interests and skills. Yet as we gather together in prayer and praise of God, we live together here as the body of Jesus Christ. We are one part of that body which lives in many different places and throughout a long, long period of human history. But throughout time and space, we are part of a community of
believers inspired by the love of God in Christ to see the world, others and ourselves, through eyes of faith, through the eyes of God.

Not only are we here to celebrate the living body of Christ at work in the church, today we celebrate the Spirit of Christ calling three young people to confirmation of their faith. Do you remember your own confirmation? Do you remember a moment when you came forward, with the congregation behind you? Can you reconnect to moments when you were surrounded with the loving prayers of those who lifted their hearts and hands to God on your behalf.

Today, we rejoice with these three young people. They will stand and publically declare their belief and trust that God is at work in their lives. This is truly an exciting milestone in the lives of Jessica, Katie, and Noah.

They will stand and profess their faith,

- they will kneel and receive the prayers and blessings of those who love them in Christ,

- they will take their place as maturing believers, crossing a marker toward adulthood, and will take on adult responsibilities in the life of the church.

There is holy energy at work in their hearts and ours.

There is excitement for the work of the Spirit of Christ in these young people.

And with this being a Sunday, the day each week we remember our Lord’s resurrection, there is expectation about new life which comes to us new every day.

We have expectation that the Lord is at work in the church, in the lives of our confirmands, and we have expectation that God is at work in our lives.

Amen.