

Sunday, October 30, 2011
Reformation Sunday

Jeremiah 31:31–34
Psalm 46
Romans 3:19–28
John 8:31–36

I.N.I.

We are extending our hands to Bethany Miriam Henkelmann Keyl today, so that she might remember and affirm her baptism.

In the Lutheran Theological cookbook, the *recipe* for baptism is Water connected with God's Word. **Water** and **Word**.

Water. You might know what water is, used for washing clean, raining down to keep the earth sustainable, a force to be reckoned with when it comes in an cold and icy October nor'easter, and going into our bodies and being a part of our bodies so that we might live. **Water** and **Word**

Word. God's Word, to which water is connected, sounds like this: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." (Matthew 28:19)

Water and **Word**, you might say, is Martin Luther's recipe for baptism.

This ritual act signifies what God is doing for the baptized, what God has done for the baptized, what God has done for Bethany, what God is doing for us.

Was is das? What is that? Luther asks in his teaching tool, called the Small Catechism. And he gives the answer: "It brings about forgiveness of sins, redeems from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe it, as the Word and promise of God declare."

In other words, GRACE with a capital G, the works, the big kahuna, the whole enchilada.

Luther bubbled over about baptism. He gushed. He couldn't contain himself, because back in the dark ages, I mean the Middle Ages, people took baptism for granted, they didn't really think it could effect what Martin Luther found it could effect, and in his overhaul of the Church which we call the Reformation, Martin Luther quite handily saved the sacrament from oblivion.

Here's what he said in the Large Catechism:

In Baptism every Christian has enough to study and to practice all her life. She always has enough to do to believe firmly what Baptism promises and brings—victory over death and the devil, forgiveness of sin, God's grace, the entire Christ, and the Holy Spirit with her gifts. In short the blessings of Baptism are so boundless that it timid nature considers them, it may well doubt whether they could all be true. LC Baptism 41-43

Bubbly, isn't he? The whole enchilada in Baptism, wouldn't you say?

Water and Word!

That crazy Martin Luther thought that God was speaking through the Word. Martin Luther thought that when God spoke about a new covenant in Jeremiah, that the promise was really was for everybody, from God's mouth to our ears.

Martin Luther thought that GRACE with a capital G was slathered all over the Scriptures, and that everyone and anyone could find it, reading it for themselves, and that St. Paul, oh that St. Paul was spot on in Romans 3 about God's mercy trumping judgment through GRACE with a capital G given through Jesus.

He gushed about that, too. Luther thought that baptism brought Christ's cross and resurrection, the divine act that changed the world. He called it the *fröliche Wechsel*, the "happy exchange," that Jesus would take our less than perfect humanity and trade it for his more than perfect divinity, in Baptism.

That makes us, according to Luther, "little Christs."

That makes you Bethany, not just a teenage confirmand, not just our little girl, but a little Christ.

Believe it? Believe it!

Now I don't know about you, but I don't usually wake up in the morning, stretch, and declare "I'm like Jesus!"

More often, I feel less than Christlike. In my absolute worst moments, which happen many days of the week, I think that if I can just work my butt off I will be the best pastor there ever was. In my absolute worst moments, which happen many days of the week, I think there is something really wrong with the world, which is true if you happen to follow the news, where the broadcasters happily chirp about murder, mayhem, and ruin.

But being Lutheran can be a game changer. Living in Christ with the help of much, but not all of what Luther wrote and wrote and wrote and wrote and wrote about, means that God is still in the building, God is the one who rules and rocks the world, the same God in Psalm 46 that Luther based his *Ein Fest Burg* on, where it says "The Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our stronghold."

Bethany, Bethesda, and anyone else who is listening this day honoring the Reformation of the Church: trust in the God of promise. Look to claim that promise in walking against the current, and riding on Christ's grace with a capital G.

And when you wonder, when you forget, when it seems as if the whole world is bent on destruction, which can happen many days of the week, say with Luther "I am baptized." Ask someone for a blessing. Or come on a Sunday, where there is a weekly gathering of saints and

sinners, who eat and drink as if they are taking in Christ himself, and then in their everyday lives as teachers, lawyers, artists, musicians, and high school students start to resemble the one who made the happy exchange, and by their lives announce that God is still in the building.

Bethany, we are glad that you are claiming that faith, that freedom, that baptism, that journey with justice, among us as the walking wet. And we want to bless it. Now!

I.N.I.