



# Pastor Ken's Sermon

---

**SERMON – REFORMATION SUNDAY  
ROMANS 3:19-28 & JOHN 8:31-36  
OCTOBER 25, 2020**

## **“WHY DO YOU BELIEVE?”**

Why do you believe in God? It was a question, among many, that Martin Luther was once asking. We'll get back to him in a bit. But first you – why do you believe, which if examined might also reveal “what” you believe about God. You might believe because your parents believed and taught you to believe. That would be wonderful but, wise, loving parents can be wrong. You might say *“because I have read the Bible for myself and believe what it says about God.”* That, too, would be wonderful, and if all people believe that is why the Bible was written and needs to be continually read – for such faith. But, the Bible is a claim about God and many other books in this world disagree with it.

You could say things - all very legitimate - like *“I see evidence of God in the world – the sublime beauty of creation, the kindness or moral courage of other human beings, I've heard of the amazing sacrifices of men and women – martyrs, who died rather than renounce their faith.”* You would have to admit at the same time that the world perplexes you, beauty is marred by natural disasters or perverted by human sin - kindness, compassion and moral courage often overwhelmed by their opposites. You may even wonder why these virtues are needed in the first place if God is both loving and powerful or why faith is let down by the suffering.

Challenges to belief are real and persistent. Perhaps then all we are left with is this: We believe, simply because, well, we believe. We can't do anything else because of an inner conviction that which we call God is good, true, and everlasting. Is that enough? Martin Luther, for all we know about his childhood, was raised to believe in God. You may say *“well that's a given ... everybody believed in God in those days”*. But you would be wrong. They didn't believe any less than people don't believe today. But Luther believed, and we know of his parent's faith and practice of taking young Martin to church.

We have such a thing in the church as “Reformation Sunday” and we remember Martin Luther precisely because he longed for and blessedly came to know more about God than what his parents, his priests or his church taught - or at least what it is he heard them say. More than what he may have learned from walks in the countryside or stories he'd read of what other Christians had done or said. We have a “Reformation Sunday” because Martin Luther felt, and through an incredible mind, forcefully and convincingly described for us - this thing called “inner conviction – belief ... faith.”

Luther at one point in his young career tried hard “not” to believe in God. Or more precisely tried to shake off what he came to believe God was - a brooding, vengeful, demanding deity who, despite descriptions of his love and fearsome power, was unable to preside over a better world by coaxing love out of humankind – only fear. Until he discovered “a righteousness of God” – a goodness, grace and longsuffering God who knew all too well how awful sin was and the suffering it exacted on humankind. Sin that wrings the life out of our souls like so much water out of a wet towel leaving us twisted and dry, but who wanted to free a person from that.

Martin found Christ – the righteousness of God. Jesus became palpable to him, convicting and compassionate at the same time. Luther found hope in the covenant faithfulness of God – first showed Israel, then through Christ to all people. In creation, God spoke, and chaos became order and beauty. In

the Exodus, God spoke, and the mayhem of human slavery became freedom and a chance at life again. Luther realized God's word spoke primarily to trouble – to human disarray. As with a creation without form, null and void – as with helpless Hebrew slaves in Egypt, God addresses humanity when we are aimless and trapped. Luther believed that God speaks only liberation to people trapped by their own sinful appetites or the consequences of those appetites of others.

John 1:11, the lofty introduction to what John called the *Word made flesh*, says, *“(He) came to that which was his own but his own did not receive him.”* John 8:37 describes Jesus' listeners as people *“who have no room for my word.”* Luther saw to his dismay much of that in the church of his time. Those that had Bibles read them largely as a textbook on God, a sort of biography of the creator of the cosmos. Luther on the other hand believed God's Word was written to lead people out of their predicament – their bondage to sin. And he would lead us by binding us to Christ – his word made flesh, the one who is “God's righteousness.”

It is said that sometimes, as powerful, evocative and comforting as words can be, they don't really come to life for us until they have some flesh and blood on them. A Union soldier wrote in a letter home that he never understood compassion until he saw President Abraham Lincoln's face as he spoke to a dying soldier. God's words are the most wonderful one's ever written – but until they became flesh, they couldn't lead a person out of their predicament - our each and every one of us, day in and day, out stubborn as the “stain on your shirt collar” personal sin – your own part in the rebellion of the human race against it's creator.

In a document he wrote in 1520 called “The Freedom of a Christian”, Luther said this; *“it is impossible to write well about (Christian faith) or understand what has been written about it unless one has at one time or another experienced the courage which faith gives a man when trials oppress him. But he who has had even a faint taste of it can never write, speak, meditate or hear enough concerning it. It is a living spring of water welling up to eternal life, as Christ calls it in John 4:14.”*

So, why do you believe? Because you have been taught about or observed things in creation about God? Because your parents instilled that in you by the way they spoke of God, or raised you or overcame the trials of marriage and household? Good for you. But if today it is your conviction that you can look nowhere else and do no other thing - that only Jesus can lead you out of your bondage to sin, clear your heart, unclutter your mind, free your lungs to praise God instead of shout at or complain about others who, like you bear his image - then you've had an experience that you could write about forever, yet never say all that could be said. You know a love that holds you when you are troubled and a grace that frees you when you sin.

On this Reformation day, be glad that you know that God, and the one he gave you as your forgiver. Few words are needed – just breath a quiet word of thanks. Or in honor of Brother Martin, a hearty ‘danke schen’ would work too! AMEN