

Suttons Bay Congregational Church
1 Corinthians 12:1, 4-24

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¹Now about spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be ignorant.

⁴There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. ⁵There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. ⁶There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men.

⁷Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. ⁸To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, ⁹to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, ¹⁰to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues,^[a] and to still another the interpretation of tongues.^[b] ¹¹All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.

¹²The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. ¹³For we were all baptized by^[c] one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

¹⁴Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. ¹⁵If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. ¹⁶And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. ¹⁷If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. ¹⁹If they were all one part, where would the body be? ²⁰As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

²¹The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" ²²On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable,²³ and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty,²⁴ while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it,²⁵ so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. ²⁶If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

Who is your favorite Protestant Reformer of the sixteenth century? Is it that famous German, Martin Luther, who penned the first hymn we sang this morning? Luther, arguably the most famous of the Reformers—is often referred to as the Father of the Protestant Reformation. He is the only Reformer to have a Protestant denomination, Lutheranism, named after him. Though he became a Catholic monk at a young age, monastic life proved incongruent with his theology—his understanding of God. At the time, Germany was part of the Holy Roman Empire and all people were expected to participate in the life of the Catholic Church—there weren't any other choices, Catholicism was the only game in town. However, Luther changed that. One night, in a fit of rage and righteous discontent, Luther blasted the Catholic Church in 95 Theses that he nailed on the door of the church in Wittenberg. Thus began his career as a Protestant Reformer—the word Protestant comes from the word protest and Luther had a lot of protests—95 of them at least. At the core of his beliefs was the right of the common person to participate fully in the life of the church. To this end, Luther protested the sale of indulgences—a way to “buy” forgiveness. Indulgences were expensive and crooked priests pocketed the hard-earned money of parishioners seeking forgiveness. Luther thought that was a bunch of bull—God's grace is

freely given he claimed and therefore no person—not a priest or even the pope himself, had a right to sell it. Luther also insisted that the clergy and church officials were not holier or necessarily more pious than lay members of churches, therefore they should not be privy, through their clerical education, to information about the Christian faith that lay people were not. For instance, the mass was given in Latin though most German parishioners didn't speak Latin. Luther was convinced that all believers should be able to hear the word of God read in their own language so that they could understand it for themselves. Luther made Christianity and the Bible accessible to the masses and without him, we probably wouldn't have the emphasis on God's free grace and forgiveness that we do in the Protestant—and even Catholic traditions—today. And on this basis alone, he is in the running for favorite Protestant Reformer of the Sixteenth Century. But, perhaps the quality that could put Luther over the top, that thing that might convince you to declare—now that's the Reformer for me—is that he coined the phrase "Sin and Sin Boldly!" because he was so convinced that God's grace was so freely given that even the one who sinned often and boldly would be forgiven. Now what's not to like about a guy who said that?

But, before we declare a winner of the favorite Protestant Reformer contest, there are at least two other people we need to consider. One of them was John Calvin of Geneva, Switzerland. Calvin, father of the doctrine of predestination and the reformer to whom folks like Presbyterians and many Congregationalists trace their traditions, was a scholar, having studied theology extensively in the best schools in Paris and then received his doctorate degree in civil law at the age of twenty-two. After his legal training, he began to study Luther's work and a few years after receiving a theology degree from one of the finest Catholic seminaries in Europe, Calvin converted to Protestantism. Of that experience he wrote . . .

At first I remained so obstinately addicted to the superstitions of the papacy that it would have been hard indeed to have pulled me out of so deep a quagmire by a sudden conversion. But God subdued and made a teachable a heart which, for my age, was far too hardened in such matters. Having received some foretaste and knowledge of true piety, I was inflamed with such great desire to [learn and grow from it.]

Calvin became a great teacher of Protestantism and his chapel, now snuggled among other buildings on a narrow, hilly street in Geneva, was a hot-spot for reformed thought in the sixteenth century. Calvin often returned to that statement from his conversion experience—that God subdued and made teachable his heart—as a basis for the personal reform that could come from Protestant thought. Historian Steven Ozment wrote the following of Calvinism.

“The union of internal belief and external behavior would become the hallmark of Calvinism. Calvinists distinguished themselves, above all, by their fervent belief that religion not only changed inward self-perception, but also transformed public life and manners; beliefs could not sit idly in the mind, but must renew individuals and societies. Nothing stands out more prominently in the history of Calvinism than the enforcement of a high standard of individual and social sanctification.”

And so, the outcome of conversion to Protestantism is a bit different with Calvin than with Luther. Whereas Luther proclaimed, sin and sin boldly, Calvin remained convinced that if someone was truly a believer in the Word of God and really wanted to follow the ways of Jesus, if the individual's heart had really been subdued and made teachable, then the person's behavior and actions would reflect that change and he or she would act in ways that were more loving, charitable, and consistent with Christ's teaching. Calvin's belief in the human potential to change and truly convert to better ways of living and being are enough to put him in the running for favorite Protestant Reformer.

But, before you make your choice, I ask you to consider the life and work of one more reformer, who you may guess since I saved him for last, is my personal favorite—Ulrich Zwingli of Zurich, Switzerland. Like Luther, Zwingli began his religious career as a Catholic monk. And it's the beginning of his ministry, much more so than the height of his career as a reformer or his unfortunate demise, that prompts me to call him my favorite. From the beginning, Zwingli put his faith into action. When the plague was tearing through Zurich and thousands of people were suffering and dying alone, Zwingli did what few others dared to do. He knowingly went into the homes of those suffering from the plague and ministered to them. He put his own life on the line to be Christ to people in crisis. Indeed, he even contracted the plague because of his repeated exposure. Instead of sitting back and commenting on the situation or isolating himself in an ivory tower, Zwingli was right there in the thick of it. He also emphasized preaching on Biblical texts at a time when most priests preached doctrinal statements or the other "canned" sermons that came down from the higher ups in the church. Zwingli was also an avid musician, sharing his flute playing in social and religious gatherings. All of these are qualities that I admire in a Reformer. The most important contribution Zwingli made to the Protestant Reformation was his articulation of the Memorialist View of Holy Communion—that the bread and the juice are a memorial to Christ—that they are symbols of the body and blood of Christ, not that they actually transform into blood and flesh. Now there's a view of communion with which I can get on board. But the thing I most appreciate about Zwingli is the important lesson his life teaches us. As Zwingli became more powerful and influential in Zurich politics, as his brand of Protestantism became the official faith of the city of Zurich, he became less and less faithful to the gospel of Jesus Christ. His life is a poignant lesson in what can happen when a person becomes too powerful, too nationalistic, and too exclusive of the thoughts and feelings of people in the minority. Zwingli got power-hungry and became famous for punishing anyone who disagreed with him. For instance, he ordered the drowning of Anabaptists—the ancestors of modern Mennonites and Amish, because they refused to confess belief in Protestant doctrine. He punished the Anabaptists for refusing to do that he had refused to do to for the Catholic Church. He became a hypocrite of the highest degree. He was a complicated character whose life ended tragically when he was drawn and quartered in battle, but still, Zwingli wins my vote for favorite Protestant Reformer because of the authenticity of his early ministry and the important lessons we can learn from his later life.

So, who do you choose—Is it the Boldy Sinning Luther, The Scholarly and Faithful Calvin, or the Humble Priest Turned Hypocritical Nationalist Ulrich Zwingli? But, more important even than your choice of favorite reformer is the question of why does it matter? What difference does it make, on this Reformation Sunday, on this day of celebrating new members in our community, what difference do these dead, white guys make? They make a difference because they committed themselves, especially Luther, to reclaiming the Biblical principle of the Church as a community instead of an institution. And what could be more important on this New Member Sunday than celebrating community? What could be more important than recognizing that a church is filled with ministers—all of us—not just the one standing in the robe behind a pulpit. And, as the Apostle Paul tells us, each of us has a unique contribution, a special talent that God has given us. And when we put all of our talents together, when we have an All Church Talent Show—that's when ministry happens.

You may be sitting there thinking—I don't have a talent, I haven't been given a spiritual gift, I don't have anything to contribute. But, I'm sure you're wrong—I'm sure that there's

something you can do, something you can contribute to the ministry of the church of Jesus Christ, somehow in which you can show someone else God's love—and what is ministry if it's not that—showing God love. And even if you're not even here, if you can't make it to church anymore and you're reading this sermon a few weeks from now because someone from the church brought it by to you, yes even you have something to contribute, some spiritual gift to share. If you pray, you're sharing your spiritual gift. If you sing in the choir, you're sharing your spiritual gift. If you visit folks in the hospital, you're sharing your spiritual gift. If you're a supportive and nurturing parent, grandparent, aunt, or godparent, you're sharing your spiritual gift. If you send people in the church cards on their anniversary or birthday, you're sharing your spiritual gift. If you save the church money by mowing the lawn or working on the parsonage, you're sharing your spiritual gift. If you show up at a committee meeting and listen and contribute, you're sharing your spiritual gift. God doesn't discriminate when it comes to doling out talents, each of us were given something that contributes to helping “God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” And because of folks like Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli, we each have the opportunity and the honor to do that, to be Christ to one another and to the world.

And today, on this Reformation Sunday, we have the opportunity to be Christ to our new members—to support them, honor them, and love them. And we also have the opportunity to allow them to be Christ to us, to let them hold us up, to welcome the ways in which they share their lives with us, and to accept the many ways in which they contribute to the life of the church. And, together with them, we will be God's people—gathered in this little corner of the world—to be a community, not an institution—doing what we all can do to support the ministry of Jesus Christ in our all church talent show—and then of us, I do believe Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli would be proud.