



ELCIC

*In Mission
for Others*

**National Bishop Susan C. Johnson's Homily
House of Bishops/Conference of Bishops
Saturday October 27, 2007**

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Romans 3:19-28

John 8:31-36

It is such an honour to have been asked to preach here today. Let me take the opportunity to thank the Diocese of Huron and Bishops Bruce and Bob, the planning committee and all the volunteers for the wonderful hospitality you have extended to us! I know how much effort planning such a big event entails and I want you to know how much we appreciate it. But I must admit that you are a very brave lot of people – to ask a Lutheran Bishop to preach on Reformation Day texts and then to try to time-limit her by calling it a homily!

Let me begin by confessing to you the temptation that we as Lutherans face as we celebrate the Reformation. There is a temptation to let our hearts swell with Lutheran pride as we sing our anthem - A Mighty Fortress Is Our God. There is a temptation to extol the virtues of our great leader Martin Luther and his many accomplishments - "Luther, Luther, he's our man, if he can't do it, no one can." There is a temptation to indulge in separatist fervour as we celebrate how we are Lutheran and the rest of the church is not. It's tempting to get caught up in triumphalism. To cry out that we have picked the winning team - that we have the right answers, the right faith. But as tempting as it is my friends that is not what Reformation Day is all about.

Instead I want to focus on the amazing promises we hear in these lessons. From Jeremiah, the promise that God will be our God and we will be God's people. From St. Paul's letter to the Romans, the promise that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law. And the promise from John's gospel that we are free indeed. Those are amazing promises.

I want to speak to my bishop colleagues for a moment about the special challenges we have in hearing these promises – the rest of you are welcome to listen in! I'm still pretty new at this bishop thing, but already I know that it is easy to get puffed up by the opinions of others around us. There are some people who seem to think that bishops are akin to superman or wonderwoman, that we have superpowers, and that by virtue of our office we can do no wrong. And it's tempting for us to want to agree with them and think that we don't need God's promises.

There is an equal but opposite temptation that we face and perhaps it is the one that we are more likely to gravitate to, namely that we are so aware of our own shortcomings and weaknesses and so overwhelmed by the responsibilities that our church has placed on us that we fail to see the gifts we have been given. We fail to hear that these promises are for us!!

So hear again the wonder of these promises – the promise that God will be our God and we will be God’s people, the promise that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law. And the promise that we are free indeed.

We all, each and every one of us, get to wear the righteousness of Christ, like the hand-me-down sweater of a much loved and admired big brother. That’s why we wear these white robes - they are a reminder of the righteousness of Christ that we put on in baptism, and a reminder that the righteousness is Christ’s not our own. We probably should wear them in sizes XXXXXL and extra extra tall so that we trip on them and swim in them and are reminded that Christ’s righteousness is much bigger than our own! This great gift comes to us through our faith in Christ and the amazing thing is that this faith itself is a gift from God. This, my friends, this is the good news of the Reformation!! This is what is worth celebrating.

Finally I want to remind you, and me too, that the work of the reformation is not yet done. The Reformation is a process that continues today and beyond. We all need to wear signs around our necks, and hang signs on our churches that read “Work in Progress”. The Reformation is a process where we encounter the living Word of God. Luther’s experience of the living Word led him to confront that which he saw destroying the Word or making it empty. And we need to ask ourselves, how might we need to be confronted as well? What is the Reformation or transformation that needs to occur in our lives? In our congregations and parishes, our synods and dioceses? In our national churches? In the church universal? Celebrating the Reformation means re-committing to that reforming process that will mould us and change us and shape us until we conform our lives, our churches and our world to the vision that God has for us.

And that is the challenge that faces us. To resist the temptation to become static and satisfied, thinking that the work of reforming is over and done. Instead we need to continue to allow the Holy Spirit to reform and transform us, to open up ourselves and our churches to be enabled to be *In Mission for Others* and in all we do to *Draw the Circle Wide, Draw it Wider Still*.