

Devotion for Week of October 30, 2022

Rev. Jeanne Simpson

We just celebrated Reformation Sunday this past Sunday, and folks wore outfits and symbols of their ethnic heritage. The Protestant Reformation swept across Europe in the 1500s, and it coincided with the Renaissance. While many count Martin Luther as the father of the Reformation, it really began earlier with theologians like Arnold of Brescia, Peter Waldo, John Wycliffe, Jan Hus, Petr Chelčický, and Girolamo Savonarola. Most just wanted to reform the Catholic Church, not to leave the church or found a new one. But Rome resisted these reforms and persecuted the reformers. And as a result, we have various protestant denominations today.

The Renaissance played a large role, beginning with the printing press. Having books available for the common people for the first time, literacy began to spread. While reformers like Luther, John Calvin, and John Knox could only preach to a small number of people, the printed word could spread their messages to thousands more. Along with allowing the ideas of the Reformation to spread in a way that they never would have been able to before, the printing press also put more Germanic-language Bibles into circulation, a win for the Protestant church.

The intellectual basis of the Renaissance was its version of humanism, derived from the rediscovery of classical Greek philosophy. This new thinking became manifest in art, architecture, politics, science and literature. Early examples were the development of perspective in oil painting, educational reform, development of political diplomacy, modern banking and accounting, and a reliance on observation and inductive reasoning in science. Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo were called “renaissance men.” The Reformation, where common people were able to read the Bible in their own languages and interpret it for themselves, naturally grew out of this focus on the importance of human thought.

About every 500 years, some sort of religious reformation occurs in the Christian church. There were seven ecumenical councils from the late 400’s to the 700’s as the early church struggled to unify and define theological beliefs, such as the Trinity. Results of these councils included creedal statements, such as the Apostle’s and Nicene Creeds, and the break between the Western and Eastern churches over the nature of Christ, use of icons, and the Biblical canon.

Some say we are in the middle of a reformation right now. Contemporary churches have new ways of worshipping and new types of music, and they often don’t meet in traditional church buildings. And then we have 1/3 of the US population that calls itself “nones.” They claim no affiliation with Christian or any other beliefs. Think about that. What will the church look like in 50 years? And what do you think we can do as believers to bring those “nones” into the body of Christ? What should evangelism look like right now? Let’s talk about it.

Jeanne