



Re-ignited through Love: The Heart of Reformation

Rev. Otto Menko

On October 31, 1517, Martin Luther, a thirty three years old German priest, friar of the Augustinian Order and a professor of moral theology at the University of Wittenberg, nailed a large-sized paper to the church door in Wittenberg. On that paper, he posted his 95 theses, highlighting the abuses within the Church of his time.



(The 43 years old Martin Luther, portrait by Lucas Cranach)

Luther's grievances primarily centered on the sale of indulgences. The indulgences were certificates issued by the Church promising the buyers absolution from their sins. People could also purchase indulgences on behalf of their deceased loved ones, who, in return, were released from the torments of purgatory and could enter heaven. In reality, the sale of these certificates was a fundraising scheme employed by the Church, primarily to finance the construction of the St. Peter Basilica in Rome.

Martin Luther's momentous act was a courageous step of defiance and a passionate appeal to the Church and its members to align their lives and practices with values firmly rooted in the Scriptures. He couldn't foresee the far-reaching ramifications of his action, as it provided the last spark to ignite the fire of a widespread reformation that had been in the making since Jan Hus in the mid-14th century.

The Protestant Reformation provides many lessons; in some ways, these lessons remain as relevant today as they were 500 years ago. Perhaps the most fundamental and timeless lesson is that God's grace offered through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ

cannot be bought, deserved, or earned; it is a gift offered freely out of God's love and can be received only by faith. Another essential lesson is that the Church's ministry, mission, and the conduct of believers must demonstrate the grace deeply grounded in God's love for all and our love for God, as well as our love for our neighbors and fellow humans. Consequently, grace, faith, and love are tightly interwoven and inseparable, with love as the strongest binding force (John 3:16).

This line of thought leads us to the Lectionary reading for this approaching Reformation Sunday, the 'Great Commandment,' with its ageless message. This Scripture passage underscores that only our authentic love for God and our neighbors has the power to rekindle the flickering embers of faith, to draw it back from the depths of spiritual apathy, shallowness, self-centeredness, and superficiality, and transform it into a living embodiment of God's grace.

We read in Matthew chapter 22:37-40 that Jesus, when asked about the most important commandment, replied, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

One way to paraphrase this passage is the following:

God asks only two things of us. Firstly, to love God wholeheartedly, with every fiber of our being—our heart (emotions), soul (spiritual essence), and intellect (mind and will). Secondly, and of equal importance, God asks us to love fellow human beings in a manner that mirrors our love for ourselves. It means that we must think of, value, and treat them with the same regard we hold for ourselves, regardless of differences in race, gender, age, nationality, political or religious views, social status, background, education, preferences, weaknesses, or imperfections. By living and acting according to these expectations, we embody all the teachings and wisdom within the Holy Scriptures.

The message of the Great Commandment presents a striking contrast to our usual way of living and behaving. Firstly, we often love God in ways that suit our preferences, the way it makes us feel good, and sometimes only in theory. Secondly, we tend to prioritize self-love above all else, often exhibiting degrees of bias, judgment, and a tendency to place our self-interest ahead of others.

The Great Commandment indeed raises the bar for all of us. Our conventional standards for godliness are often too lenient, self-

serving, and flawed. By pointing to God's expectations, it calls us to a higher standard of love – one that is all-encompassing, selfless, consistent, inclusive, and transformative. It challenges us to love as God loves us, setting a profound example for our interactions with the world and those around us.

Consequently, it becomes clear that we cannot please or glorify God solely through correct beliefs. The true fulfillment of this purpose lies not in theological correctness alone but in living in harmony with God's expectations. While the Protestant Reformation predominantly centered on the content of faith, the Great Commandment shifts our focus toward the practical application and embodiment of our faith in our daily lives. It emphasizes that faith must be actively practiced and lived, not just believed and professed.

Some of us may respond to this with the familiar phrase, "easier said than done," for we must contend daily with our world's realities and our sinful and frail human nature.

In our rapidly changing modern age, the expectation to wholeheartedly love God and extend that love to others can undoubtedly feel even more challenging and demanding than it did in times past. The complexities of contemporary life and the distractions that come with it often make our commitment to love all the more daunting.

Consider, for example, how day in and day out, we are inundated with and often uncritically consume an enormous amount of information, some true and some untrue. We are unequipped to process and digest such a deluge, desensitizing and dulling our minds and senses.

Furthermore, our digital age has given us unprecedented connectivity, yet it has also led to a growing disconnect from others and even from ourselves. Many people choose online communities over real-life human connections, not out of justifiable necessity but because of the convenience, comfort, and almost unlimited variety they offer, in addition to the benefit of having no accountability and responsibility.

In our constant preoccupations and relentless rush, we allocate less and less quality time for God, for others, and ourselves. We seldom pause to think, contemplate, read, listen, meditate, or pray without the pressing urgency of our next activity, driven by a fear of falling behind or the unrelenting demands we face. It is no wonder that we find it increasingly difficult to demonstrate or express love beyond the confines of our self-centered lives.

Moreover, who among us can live up to the standards expressed in the Great Commandment when we face the reality of our sinful nature daily, along with our inherent weaknesses and limitations? Many of us have learned to accept our shortcomings and use them as excuses, even when we know we could do better. We may have given up on improving ourselves with God's help, and we tend to ignore the Biblical mandate of sanctification, which is intended to shape our Christian lives from the moment we are saved until the end of our earthly lives.

By nature, none of us can love as God loves or extend the same love to others that we reserve for ourselves. But when we

consciously and intentionally give more space to God's Holy Spirit in our lives, the life and nature of Jesus begins to radiate through our being. Then, we are on the path of gradual transformation to become more and more Christ-like. Again, this transformation does not happen by chance; besides our faith, it demands consistent effort.

So, in light of the Great Commandment, let us consider God's expectations as an invitation to renew our commitment to love. As a practical sign of this, we can begin with slowing down, becoming more selective with our information consumption, choosing real-life human interaction, dedicating quality time to God and others, and by pursuing our sanctification. Decisions like these could serve as the first steps in our personal and collective reformation and transformation.

Let us be intentional and unwavering in our commitment to love, even in the face of failures and setbacks. Let us engage daily in practical acts of love in our relationship and interaction with God and our neighbors. Let us actively seek opportunities to serve, support, and uplift one another and consistently place loving God and others above self-interest. Doing so can rekindle and re-ignite the flame of renewal in our lives and our communities.



(Group photo at the East End United Church)

As the Lions Club of Tropical Gardens continued their Breast Cancer Awareness Month campaign, it was time for the East End and Gun Bay United Churches to host the group. The group visited the East End United Church for a joint worship service with Gun Bay United on October 22, 2023.

This year's Breast Cancer Awareness Month is observed under the theme, "Early detection saves lives." Dr. Jagan Ramamurthy, a Surgical Oncologist at Health City Cayman Islands, gave a presentation on the theme and the importance of early detection and the benefits of surgical oncology. After his presentation, Dr. Ramamurthy invited the members of the Congregation to ask questions. This was followed by a responsive litany of solidarity (see below) by Lion Maxine Bravo.

Litany of Solidarity written by Diann L. Neu

Leader: Holy God, you are our Sustainer, Healer, Deliverer, Provider, and our Strength, especially, for every person who hears the words: “You have cancer.” Today, we lift our voices and say:

Response: “Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved: for thou art my praise,” and surround us with those who will say:

We are here with you; you are not alone!

Leader: For every woman or man who hears the words: “You have cancer,” there are family and friends who are shocked and grieving. For all mothers and fathers, partners, wives and husbands, children and siblings, friends and colleagues who wait and watch as they offer support, saying:

Response: *We are here with you; you are not alone!*

Leader: For all scientists involved in cancer research whose life and work make early detection, careful diagnosis, and the hope of healing possible. *God of Many Names, guide their minds to discover the ways of cancer,* and remind us of Your Word:

Response: “These things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God,” and hearing voices around us say: *We are here with you; you are not alone!*

Leader: For women who fight the exhaustion, the fear, the loss of hair and appetite from the long days of chemotherapy and radiation treatment; for women who fight back, who stay the course, and look fear in the face with courage and even with humor;

Response: *God of Courage and Laughter, surround us with people who will say: We are here with you; you are not alone!*

Leader: Faith, family, and community are sources of help and healing as well as prayers and visits, phone calls, cards, food and kind acts bring comfort and healing;

Response: *God of Hospitality, surround us with community, as we hear family and friends say: We are here with you; you are not alone!*

Leader: Lord, we know that you are greater than any disease or illness. For you heal all of our diseases, you redeem our lives from the pit and crown us with steadfast love and mercy, renewed strength, and provision for our needs according to your riches in glory, *when you say:*

Response: *I am here with you; you are not alone!*

Leader: Spirit of Life, give strength to everyone undergoing tests, to face the unknown with patience; to go through the tests, and courage to make the best decisions for their health, as we hear you say:

Response: *I am here with you; you are not alone!*

Leader: We thank you, O God, for all survivors, especially, those who are enduring the journey; give us faith to believe there will be a cure and work toward the day when cancer does not take the lives of our loved ones.

Response: *Divine Healer, send your healing spirit to bring a cure for cancer now, when you say: I am here with you; you are not alone!*

The Scripture lesson was taken from 1 Corinthians 13: 4-8.

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.”

In his sermon, Rev. Forrester implored the congregation to embrace Paul’s exhortation, saying that we should demonstrate love through the care and support we offer to those diagnosed and undergoing treatment. To show love to those who need our constant support. To love God’s gift of our bodies that much to ensure we examine for early detection – because it really saves lives.



*By Mrs. Jacynthia Anderson
(President – WF, CIRMC)*



The Women’s Fellowship Council team held the Gathering 2023 event at Savannah United Church on October 21, 2023. The theme for the event was: ‘Let’s Realign Our Worship’. The presenters for the event were WF Chair - Programme & Literature Ms. Katherine Jackson and the United Church ministers Rev. Rohan Forrester (Chair of Council), Rev. L. Christopher Mason, Rev. Donovan Myers, and Rev. Euthman Wray.

The event was open to both men and women, particularly individuals who lead or participate in worship. A total of 40 people attended.

Rev. Wray led the devotion to the topic, ‘This is my Worth-ship,’ accompanied by the Praise Team and music from Mr. Noel. Rev. Wray challenged the audience to take a step back and reflect on the basics of our faith and the importance of worshipping God as the One who is worthy.

The Keynote Speaker, Rev. Myers introduced 1 Corinthians 14: 15-16 and summarized worship as 'Action-Reaction-Revelation-Response'. This simple framework helped the audience better understand the dynamic relationship between us and God.

Rev. Mason's training session focused on the role of the 'Liturgist'. He taught us how to improve our worship. Rev. Mason humorously demonstrated a noisy leader and the importance of letting the spirit lead. Most importantly, he reminded the audience that when given the task of leading the worship, they are not emceeing a concert.

Rev. Forrester conducted the Launching of the Women's Fellowship Devotional Booklets and the training session on 'Leading Prayers.' In summary, we were reminded of the importance of waiting on the Lord and listening to His Spirit in times of silence. He also quoted Ecclesiastic 5:2. We were also reminded of the effectiveness, length, and things to avoid when praying. Most importantly, he encouraged us to be up to date with the news.

Ms. Jackson's training session was on 'Reading The Word.' She reminded us that, as readers of the Word, we are communicators of God and representing the Most High God. Ms. Jackson said that 'Reading the Word' is a profound responsibility and a great privilege.



The audience much appreciated the knowledge shared clearly and engagingly. All the presentations were informative and inspiring. The event was a huge success because all the contributions were immeasurable. The positive feedback from the attendees confirmed they are looking forward to Training Session II.

In summary, the Gathering 2023 was a successful event that provided valuable training and insights to those who conduct or participate in worship. The keynote speech, training sessions, and devotion were informative and inspiring. The event was well received by the attendees, who are looking forward to Training Session II.

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