

Words for an Emerging Church

Reformation Day, Sunday, October 31, 2021

Not By Chance

Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. —Matthew 10:29-31

More than just a visit into our history, Reformation Day is an opportunity to celebrate biblical truths rediscovered in the early 16th century which speak as powerfully today as they did then. This is, after all, God's eternal truth and we need not worry about an expiration date. Our thoughts of Reformation usually begin with the doctrines of the Bible's absolute authority over all human traditions, or the fullness of God's saving grace which rescues us in spite of ourselves. In this seemingly never-ending season of the Covid virus there is another Reformation doctrine which speaks a powerful and comforting word. While it is one of the lesser recognized teachings of the Reformation, it is still a priceless treasure, especially in a moment like this. I refer to the doctrine of providence, and rather than define it myself, I gladly defer to the poetic beauty of the Heidelberg Catechism.

27 Q. WHAT DO YOU UNDERSTAND BY THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD?

A. Providence is the almighty and ever present power of God by which He upholds, as with his hand, heaven and earth and all creatures, and so rules them that leaf and blade, rain and drought, fruitful and lean years, food and drink, health and sickness, prosperity and poverty -- all things, in fact, come to us not by chance but by His fatherly hand.

By all appearances our world is going crazy. The newspapers have not been a pleasant read and it does look as though the situation is only getting worse. All our top researchers, politicians and leaders appear to be at a loss as to how to turn our situation around. It looks as though the virus will be with us forever, and this would seem to be a cause for despair. In the face of all this there is, however, a great hope: providence. To believe in providence is not to deny for a moment the pain and difficulty of all that the world presents us. What providence does tell us is that in and through all this suffering and craziness God is in control and is working out a perfect plan. This God also happens to be our loving heavenly Father! Again let it be said—this is not to deny the genuine suffering which this world hands out in bushels. What it does say is that all this is for a purpose, and the greatest illustration of providence

is Christ's suffering and death which was the ultimate injustice perpetrated by a rebellious human race, and was used by God as the greatest act of love—our salvation. God is in control, and we can gladly say of all that comes our way in life, *all things, in fact, come to us not by chance but by His fatherly hand.*

The Catechism not only describes providence, but it also tells us why this biblical truth should mean so much to us.

28 Q. HOW DOES THIS KNOWLEDGE OF GOD'S CREATION AND PROVIDENCE HELP US?

A. We can be patient when things go against us,
thankful when things go well,
and for the future we can have
good confidence in our faithful God and Father
that nothing can separate us from His love.
All creatures are so completely in his hand
that without his will they can neither move nor be moved.

We preachers love to preach, but I must refrain from further exposition on this sweet truth. The Catechism says it so eloquently that I can only invite all to spend some time re-reading and meditating upon the beauty of it all.

As this virus crisis drags on, I continue to pray for an end to it all. That is a good prayer to pray, and I am sticking with it. But until that prayer is answered, I will affirm my faith in providence. This may not be the answer to prayer which I desire presently, but it is such a comfort to know that the God who loves us is in control and shall get us through it all and build a mighty Church in the process!

Our Father is in control. Let us be glad.

Blessings,

Pastor Jim

As the rain hides the stars, as the autumn mist hides the hills, as the clouds veil the blue of the sky, so the dark happenings of my lot hide the shining of thy face from me. Yet, if I may hold thy hand in the darkness, it is enough. Since I know that, though I may stumble in my going, thou dost not fall.

—Source unknown (Celtic)