

## ALWAYS BEING RE-FORMED

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Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church

“The Church is Reformed and Always Being Reformed, according to the Word of God, according to the Spirit of God.” This is one of the great slogans of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century Protestant Reformation, the religious heritage of our Presbyterian denomination.

Put simply: God forms us. Then God re-forms us. Then God re-forms, and re-forms, and re-forms us, over and over and over again in ways that can be radically exciting, like today, but also profoundly painful and downright scary.

It seems fitting that the liturgical calendar would mark our first Sunday together as “Reformation Sunday” – the Sunday in which Presbyterians across the nation are called to root ourselves firmly in the tradition from which we come – even as we branch out in new ways for a new day.

Today, we join with Presbyterian preachers across the country who have prepared about historic teachings on Creation or Sin, or about how Presbyterians read the Bible, or (my personal favorite) about how we deal with that much-maligned and thorny doctrine of double predestination.

I have good news for those of you who came to hear me preach just such a sermon. You will hear one!

Just not today ...

Today I want to begin with a confession: Reformation, or re-formation as I prefer to call it, is hard. Even when it is exciting. Even when it is everything we have said we wanted it to be. Even when we are excited. Thrilled. Ready to be re-formed, as I become your pastor and you become my people.

The truth is you and I have no idea where this particular re-formation will lead us. We have hopes. We have ideas. We have visions and dreams. But we have no certainty. We never do.

The truth is that re-formation, even a good one, requires us to change.

But we thought the change was over (I can hear you crying out with your hearts, if not your voices). We just went through a really long interim period! And before that we said goodbye to a pastor of FORTY-TWO years! Pastor Gusti, you’re supposed to bring us stability, not change!

And it is true, in a very large sense. I am here. To stay. Today begins what I hope will be an exceptionally long period of stability and growth for our ministry together.

But it is also true that simply by showing and being who I am, with all of my potential and all of my pitfalls, is a pretty radical change. I cannot take you “back to normal.” I can only lead you “forward to a new normal.” It is also true that you simply being who you are, with all of your potential and all of your pitfalls, is a pretty radical change for me. I cannot be the same pastor with you that I have been in the past. You are also leading me into a new normal.

As the saying goes: Even if I am not going to change *for* you, I cannot help but be changed *by* you.

And change is hard.

It is also, at least for me – and I have heard tell from a rousing chorus of you – that this particular change is really, really GOOD!

Just as it is at the beginning of time, in our Scripture lesson from Genesis, when God sees fit to initiate re-formation by creating humankind in the first place, breathing God's own breath into dust from the original humus that God created.

God places the human in a beautiful garden with trees and fruit. And the human being and the beautiful garden are very good, something to be celebrated!

But it is *not* good for the human to be alone.

So God re-forms the original human in order to form a corresponding helper. The male and the female both re-formed from the original human, in order to provide companionship for one another. And it is very good, something to be celebrated!

Finally, we have human community for support and encouragement. Finally the re-formation seems to be complete!

But you know the story. Along comes a serpent and the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And the need for yet another re-formation. And another. And another.

The first re-formation of humanity because even God needs a second chance. The ones that follow because we do.

The promise of Scripture for our ongoing re-formation is that, through every moment of formation and re-formation, the God who is nearer to us than our breath, the God whose Spirit is, in fact, our breath itself, is present, is personal, is breathing life and energy and wholeness and hope throughout every part of this beautiful and good and glorious creation.

*And God is not done with us yet!*

Whatever re-formation you need or I need or that our congregation or our country or our relationship with the entire climate needs—the re-formations we *know* we need and the ones we pretend we don't need—God is not done with us yet! And God is doing everything God can to make this very good creation just a little bit “good-er.”

In the end, being formed and re-formed and always being re-formed in this primal story of our creation is not about change for the sake of change. Or chaos for the sake of chaos. Or theological inquiry for the sake of theological inquiry. Being formed and re-formed and always being re-formed, according to the Word of God, according to the Spirit of God, is about companionship and community, about finding and receiving help, about learning to live in joyous relationship with one another over and over and over again.

*And it is fun!*

So let us celebrate, indeed, God's playful and joyous work of re-formation among us with our own attitude of

play and joy.

Because we are always about the business of being re-formed here at Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church.

And it is very, very GOOD!

Amen.