Always Being Re-Formed
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Based on Genesis 2:18-23. God Re-Forms the First Human.

The Church is Reformed and Always Being Reformed, according to the Word of God, in the power of the Spirit. This is one of the great slogans of the Protestant Reformation, the religious heritage of our denomination.

Progressive Presbyterians love this slogan! We love reforming anything we can get our hands on! We used the *always reforming* slogan to ordain women and LGBTQIA+ folks. We used it to achieve marriage equality. We use it in our anti-racism work. We are *always reforming*, we say, as in we are always trying to make the church — and the world — a better place. Yay us! Let's keep reforming!

Except, it turns out, the original slogan puts the emphasis on *God* doing the reforming, not on *our* heroic efforts. As much as we like to think we are in charge of all of that re-forming, the truth much more clearly suggests the re-forming takes charge of us. The reforming *God* does, it turns out, requires a radical identity shift, including for *us*, as in our Lesson today, when God forms and then re-forms the very first human in order to form human community.

According to Genesis, God forms a human from the humus, breathing God's own breath into the dust. But it is *not* good for the human to be alone. So God re-forms the original human in order to form a true partner. This re-forming is far more dramatic than our English translations imply. Not some lullaby and the loss of a mere rib but getting knocked unconscious and slicing off an entire side. In order to experience human community the first human must literally become a new creation.

It is very good, though. We have human community for support and encouragement. Yay for re-formation! Until the serpent comes and the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and the need for yet another re-formation. The first re-formation to fulfill the need for human community. The second re-formation because human community messes itself up. On and on, as human history continues, the need for human re-formation continues, either as a result of the quest for a more equal partnership or as a result of our need to be fixed of all we get wrong. The church is, indeed re-formed *and always in need of being re-formed.*

All of this will sound familiar to those of you who remember my very first sermon with you on Reformation Sunday seven years ago. Today's sermon is a re-write of that one. It seemed fitting, back then, that we would begin our ministry together on a day in which our liturgical calendar calls us to root ourselves firmly in our heritage, even as we branch out in new ways for a new day. If you were here for that first Sunday, you will remember we began with remarkable enthusiasm and courage amid the call to this current re-formation. We were excited, thrilled, ready to do a new thing together with hope and ideas and vision.

Even so, even on that very first Sunday, I warned us we could have no true certainty about what this particular re-formation would require. I warned us that re-formation demands change. The life altering kind, the kind that knocks us unconscious and takes out half our side, like the creation of human community in Genesis 2. I predicted our re-formation as pastor and people would require me to become a different kind of pastor than I had ever been before and that it would require you to become a different kind of congregation than you had ever been before. I insisted we should not change *for* one another but acknowledged we could not help but be changed *by* one another. I trusted we would be changed *for good.* I still trust that.

Little did we know a global pandemic would prove that sermon far more prescient than any of us could have imagined. Re-forming has certainly happened *to* us these past seven years — and the radical, life altering, knocked unconscious change that comes with it. We have been re-formed through hybrid worship and a cultural paradigm shift in how we cultivate community. We have been re-formed through a generational shift in the entire staffing model and Deacons equipped and empowered to Share the Care. We have been re-formed with Guns to Gardens capturing our moral imagination and prayer vigils for the nation enriching our spirit-led resistance to tyrannical power.

We have been re-formed with heartbreaking losses due to departure or death. We have been re-formed with enthusiastic new energy and insights from new members who have no clue what I am talking about with all this re-forming life altering knock out change. I have, indeed, thanks to the Spirit of God and the generosity of this community, become an entirely new pastor. SPC has become an entirely new congregation. We have all been changed by one another. A more authentic partnership has been formed. Not without self-inflicted nonsense, to be sure, especially on my part when Grumpy Gusti notices half her side is missing! Always through the grace of God, whose Spirit is nearer to us than our breath, working all things together for good for we who are called to God's purpose.

On this Reformation Sunday seven years later, may we know with even greater certainty the same Spirit who did what had to be done by re-forming the first human in order to establish human community. May we know that Spirit is present through our own re-formation, it is personal, and it is breathing life and energy and wholeness and hope throughout every part of this beautiful and good and glorious creation. Whatever re-formation we continue to need — the re-formations we *know* we need and the ones we pretend we do not need — will also be for good. God is doing everything God can to make this very good creation — including our small part of it — just a little bit "good-er."

Because we are still about the business of being formed and re-formed here at Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church. And it will continue to be an amazing Alleluia!