

***Rev. Justin Eller – Southeastern Synod
Assistant to the Bishop for Latinx Ministry Initiatives
Re-formation - B John 8:31-36***

The holy Gospel according to St. John the 8th chapter....

Good morning Church and welcome to worship on this Re-formation Sunday. I'm Justin Eller, and I serve as Assistant to the Bishop for Latinx Ministry Initiatives and one of the pastors at Amazing Grace Lutheran Church in Lawrenceville, Georgia. I bring you greetings today from Bishop Kevin Strickland, your Southeastern Synod Staff, and your fellow disciples across Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, and Tennessee.

Beloved, this is a great day of celebration! It's A celebration of God's disturbing, and vibrant Spirit at work in you and through you! It's A celebration of what God is up to in the church and the world!//

Our readings today, from Jeremiah and Psalm 46, to Romans and John, talk about slavery and salvation, faith and discipleship, truth and freedom. Jesus says in John's gospel to those who believe in him, "If you all continue in my word, you all are truly my disciples; and you all will know the truth, and the truth will make you all free." //

See our discipleship is bound up with continuing in Jesus' word. Or put another way, our discipleship is our lifelong learning of how to live in the world as Jesus teaches us to live. //

Discipleship then, is not only learning from Jesus, it's also affirming, welcoming, and treating others as Jesus would have us do, it's living freed and saved in the way of Jesus.

It's worshiping and praying together.

It's learning and teaching, continuing in Christ's word, together.

It's serving and advocating, side-by-side with our neighbor, together.

It's growing and accompanying together.

It's engaging, equipping, and empowering one another and our communities together...why? Well for one because Christ calls us to a life of service and two because our freedom is bound up with our neighbor's freedom. //

For almost two years now, we've battled the grips of the COVID pandemic, we've lost loved ones, been physically separated from friends and family and socially distanced from neighbors and fellow disciples. The poison of deeply divided partisan politics has seeped into our congregations and at times has turned us into warring factions.

We are congregations that are making it through all of this with minor bumps and bruises and we are congregations who are struggling to keep the lights on. // While, yes, all of us have had to adapt, we, the church, have been fundamentally re-formed, whether we like it or not.

The way we are church together has re-formed.

The methods of worship and teaching, faith formation and fellowship have re-formed.

Our habits, from physical attendance, to communion distribution, to stewardship have all been re-formed....

and where do we find ourselves...//...where the church has always found itself when change arrives...still in the palm of God's hands.

Part of the song *Be Alright* by Evan Craft, Danny Gokey, and Redimi2 goes:

Todo va a estar bien
Everything will be alright
The whole world's in His hands
Your whole world's in His hands
In the darkness and the trials
He's faithful and He's true
The whole world's in His hands
Y todo va a estar bien

We latch onto this hope in a never failing God because:

God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change,
though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;
though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains tremble with its tumult.

In the midst of such hard times, we witness God at work. We hear people coming together to demand their rights. We witness neighbors

teaching neighbors. We walk through streets where hope pushes back against desperation.

The prophet Jeremiah announced the new covenant God was making with God's people by putting his law within them, writing it on their hearts, and God will be our God and we shall be God's people. This promise still knows us and we still know it...but we call this promise of God's love and faithfulness, the Way, the Liberator, Jesus.

And it's in the dying and rising with Jesus in the waters of baptism, where God has and continues to re-form you with a purpose. God freed you and me from sin and calls us to be disciples in community. //

Today, we affirm that God is up to something in our lives and in our congregations and in our synod. We affirm today that living as baptized change agents, living as reformers who are walking wet, we can be examples of God's love that is freeing, a love that frees us all from worrying about our salvation, which Jesus already took care of, and frees us to focus on our neighbor.

Lilla Watson, an Indigenous activist from Australia once said, "If you have come to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together."

Each one of us, from the smallest to the biggest, is an example of Christ, God's liberating love and that kind of love not only re-forms the church, but literally, visibly, and systematically transforms the world! //

Today, we celebrate that we are all disciples of Jesus and through our universal priesthood, we are all being re-formed by God's disturbing and vibrant Spirit...that we are freed in Christ to love and serve our neighbor.

We're freed to be the change we want to see in this world, to live into God's plans of on-going love, to be part of the transformation to make this world a better place.

And we can **do** and **be** all of this, because our freedom lies in the truth of God's salvation for us and our freedom is not ours alone... it's forever connected with the freedom of all who hunger and thirst for justice, peace, and truth. //

So how will you live your discipleship this week? //

Who's life can you make a difference in today? //

Who can you pray for and who can you show up for? //

What ripples of hope can you create in your congregation? //

Beloved, remember and celebrate that the Son makes you free from sin and death and fear and all that winds you up tight, therefore, you... are... free... indeed.

Y todo va a estar bien
Everything will be alright
The whole world's in His hands
Your whole world's in His hands. //

Please pray with me...Great liberator, bearing fruit from every seed, resisting wrong, standing firm for justice, like a well-watered tree, with leaves for the healing of the nations: grace us with freedom to give ourselves away because of the nearness of your Son, Jesus Christ, our redeemer, this day and always. Amen.