"Formation … Deformation … Reformation"

The Sermon for the Commemoration of the Reformation
Preached the weekend of October 24-25, 2026
by: Rev. James T. Batchelor
at: St. John's Lutheran Church East Moline, IL
Based on: *John 8:31–36*

During my youth, I lived with my family in the city of Milwaukee. I graduated from Milwaukee Lutheran High School with the class of 1968 and Milwaukee School of Engineering with the class of 1974.

One of the things about living in the city of Milwaukee, especially this time of year, is that the activities of a certain football team permeate all conversations. It's as if everyone in Milwaukee becomes an honorary citizen of Green Bay and roots for the Packers. Of course, everyone went nuts when the Green Bay Packers won the first two championship games of what would later become known as the Super Bowl.

At the time, the coach of the Packers was the legendary Vince Lombardi. Vince Lombardi was famous for emphasizing basics … basic tackling … basic blocking … basic passing … and so forth. He drilled his team relentlessly in the basics of the game. In fact, I've heard several reliable sources say that Coach Lombardi had a very unusual way of opening preseason training camp. Once all the players had arrived, he gathered them all for a pep talk. They tell me that he began this talk by standing up with a football in his hand. As he pointed to the football, he said, "Gentlemen, this is a football." He then went on to introduce these professionals to the game of football as though they had never even seen a football game in their lives.

Today, I want to follow Coach Lombardi's example and get down to basics. Only instead of the basics of football, let's concentrate on the basics of **Reformation**.

The root of the word **reformation** is the word ***form***. The Bible tells us that *the Lord God **formed** the man … of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. (Genesis 2:7)* Here the word **form** means to give shape to something. In this case, God gave shape to man. He gave him two arms, two legs, two eyes, two ears, one mouth, a heart, lungs, and everything else. *The Lord God **formed** the man.* Now we know that the **form** of this man was exactly right because the Bible says, *God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. (Genesis 1:31)*

Ahhh … but the goodness of Adam's **form** did not last. *Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" (Genesis 3:1)* Here we see that the serpent was jealous of Adam and Eve's perfect **form,** and the serpent set out to take away the good **form** of Adam and Eve. He set out to **deform** them.

And here we see the primary weapon that the devil and all the fallen angels use to **deform** mankind. They work to separate mankind from God's Word. *Did God actually say?*

The serpent's effort to **deform** mankind was successful. *So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. (Genesis 3:6)* Adam and Eve were **deformed** and so were all their descendants … that's you and me.

By the way, it shows how **deformed** mankind is when they represent this event in picture or statue or some other work of art and they depict Eve fighting the serpent all by herself. No, the text clearly states that her husband **was with her**. Adam heard the entire conversation between the serpent and his wife and **did nothing**. He was already **deformed**.

But God knew that this would happen, and He already had a plan in place to **reform** the situation. He allowed Adam and Eve to overhear this plan for **reform** even as he proclaimed the curse on the serpent.

[14]The Lord God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. [15]I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." (Genesis 3:14–15) Here God promised to **reform** mankind by sending a savior who will crush the serpent's head.

And so, the battle began. On the one side, we have the devil and the other fallen angels doing everything possible to **deform** mankind by depriving him of the Word of God. On the other side, we have God almighty **reforming** mankind by restoring His word. So, as we make our way through the Old Testament, we see this constant ebb and flow … the devil **deforming** and God **reforming**.

One of my favorite **reformations** in the Bible involves a third grader in 2 Kings 22. *Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem. … And he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord … (2 Kings 22:1–2)* Josiah was the opposite of his father Amon and his grandfather Manasseh. *Amon was twenty-two years old when he began to reign, and he reigned two years in Jerusalem … and he did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, as Manasseh his father had done. (2 Kings 21:19–20)*

Both Amon and Manasseh had allowed the temple to fall apart. But when Josiah became an adult, he ordered the restoration of the temple. *[3]In the eighteenth year of King Josiah, the king sent Shaphan … to the house of the Lord, saying, [4]"Go up to Hilkiah the high priest, that he may count the money that has been brought into the house of the Lord, … and let them give it to the workmen who are at the house of the Lord, repairing the house (2 Kings 22:3–5)*

Now as the workers were repairing the House of the Lord, the Lord gave His word back to them. *Hilkiah the high priest said to Shaphan the secretary, "I have found the Book of the Law in the house of the Lord." And Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it. … Then Shaphan the secretary told the king, "Hilkiah the priest has given me a book." And Shaphan read it before the king. (2 Kings 22:8–10)* The devil had so **deformed** Amon and Manasseh that they had lost the Word of God in the rubble of the temple, but now God **reformed** Judah by bringing the Word of God back to His people.

You see, **reformation** is not about change for change's sake. It is not about marketing, or the latest fashion, or the newest trend, or constant innovation. Instead, it is the constant battle against the **deformation** that the devil and his allies wish to use to separate you from God's Word.

God's Word is the key. In the Gospel reading that we just heard *Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, [32]and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (John 8:31–32)* Here Jesus makes a simple step-by-step connection from His word to freedom … Word, disciple, truth, freedom. When God's Word saturates your life, you have freedom. When the devil **deforms** you, he takes that freedom away. Jesus Himself said, *"Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin." (John 8:34)* The devil does not want you to be free, he wants you to be a slave.

The ultimate **reformation** comes through Jesus Christ. He is the Word. *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14) Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, [2]but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son. (Hebrews 1:1–2)* Jesus, the Word, took the **deformation** of sin into Himself. He took your guilt, your shame, your damnation, your slavery … to the cross. There He endured the wrath of God against your **deformation**. There He also gave you the **reformation** of His righteousness. There, on the cross, the Son made you free. And *if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. (John 8:36)*

That freedom is certain because three days later, Jesus, the Word, rose from the dead. Death could not hold Him, and death will not hold you. On the Last Day Jesus will call forth all the dead, and we shall all rise … united once again in body and spirit. Then He will take you and all who believe in Him to *a new*

earth in which righteousness dwells. (2 Peter 3:13) There, *He will wipe away every tear from [your] eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." (Revelation 21:4)*

Until the day comes that we leave this world, **we** are a battlefield. The devil wants to **deform** us … separate us from God's word … make us into slaves. God **reforms** us. He gives us His word. He makes disciples. He reveals truth. He grants freedom. He gives us *the right to become children of God. (John 1:12)* **reformation** is about God bringing His Word to His people.

Martin Luther understood the importance of the Word of God. In his Second Invocavit Sermon, he preached, *"In short, I will preach [the Word], teach it, write it, but I will constrain no man by force, for faith must come freely without compulsion. Take myself as an example. I opposed indulgences and all the papists, but never with force. I simply taught, preached, and wrote God's Word; otherwise I did nothing. And while I slept, or drank Wittenberg beer with my friends Philip and Amsdorf, the Word so greatly weakened the papacy that no prince or emperor ever inflicted such losses upon it. I did nothing; the Word did everything."*

Martin Luther, Luther's Works, Vol. 51: Sermons I, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 51 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999), 77.

Back in my seminary days, we used to debate the question, "Do we need a continuous **Reformation**?" If **reformation** means change for change's sake … if it means constant innovation … if it means human marketing and sales techniques … if it means the constant development of new measures … then the answer is NO! If, on the other hand, **reformation** recognizes that we are sinners living in a sinful world … that the devil and his fallen angels are constantly at work **deforming** us by leading us away from God's Word … that it is their goal to make us into slaves of sin, **then we need constant reformation** … the **reformation** that abides in Christ's Word and creates disciples … the **reformation** that reveals the truth … the truth that sets us free.

The **deformation** of the devil, the world, and our own sinful nature continuously tries to draw us away from the Word of God. The true **reformation** is God's gift that causes us to abide in Christ's word. Abiding in Christ's Word is really the same as abiding in Christ crucified and risen from the dead for you. And your salvation lies in that Christ … the one revealed in His Word. Amen