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Greetings from Germany! As I write my words to you, I am currently surrounded by routine comings and goings of people in small town Germany. I'm stationed here for a year, ministering to Navy Sailors each week who return from deployments to the Middle East. Many of these folks are citizen-Sailors, returning to live in towns and cities perhaps not unlike yours. The ministry is to help reconnect Sailors to those parts of their humanity and life they were isolated and disconnected from during their deployments. In a sense, it's helping them re-establish the emotional and spiritual connections with themselves and their loved ones.

It is also not lost on me that I am in Germany and am writing to you on this Reformation Sunday. I sit here where it all happened: an outspoken German monk who unknowingly changed the world. Of course, like any history it's often a complex story. For example, I wonder often if the German electors and princes had not protected and supported Luther, would the Reformation had happened at all? And, were the rulers' motives entirely spiritual, or was it a convenient excuse to break away from the grasp of the Holy Roman Empire? Questions too complex and too large to explore this morning, but perhaps what we can just say is that the Reformation happened, and as through many things, the Holy Spirit worked in such a way to once again change the world and people's lives.

What I find interesting, however, is that we Lutherans get more excited about the Reformation than any other Protestant group. The fact is, the Reformation wasn't a "Lutheran" thing. Calvin, Zwingli, the Radical Reformers, and many others also brought about the Reformation. Yet, how many sermons have you heard preached on Reformation Sunday that

are homages to Luther, the 95 Theses, or any of his other theological contributions? Truth is, I wonder if we haven't treated the Reformation as some sort of celebration exclusive only to Lutherans, and something only we are entitled to celebrate.

That draws me to three of our texts today. As you heard Jeremiah, the Psalm, and Hebrews, the concern is the community of believers. What will happen to Israel in the midst of their Babylonian exile? "Save O Lord, your people?" And Jeremiah offers a word of hope and promise that God will indeed do that. Psalm 126 addresses the concern over the fortunes of Zion, God's city, God's people. The Psalmist reminds us: God responds. God promises. And the concern in Hebrews is drawing the community of faith about a long line of prophets who essentially fell short of the prophecies and the fulfillment of the Law. Jesus is the prophet who does that, and is "more than a prophet."

All this is good news.....but good news for believers. For communities of faith. For you and me.

Mark's gospel story reinforces the same proclamation and promises of God, but reframes it. This story is fundamentally about someone outside the community; a non-believer, a blind beggar named Bartimaeus. "Have mercy on me!" he cries, and the more people try to silence him, the louder he cries out. And as you just heard, Jesus responds to his cries, and heals him.

This story is perhaps one of the clearest and purest examples of how the Gospel at work; the very real presence of Jesus drawing near someone in their time of need, and healing them. It's the same promise that is heard in our other three texts, but with a twist: This good

news is certainly for us. It is for the believer, the community of faith, for congregations in need, for you, and for me.

But it is also for those outside of it as well.

I wonder, just as we do with our celebration of Luther and Lutheranism on this Reformation Sunday, acting as if it's only something that happened within our tradition, acting as if it's only important to us, if we miss the fact that God's promises are for all people. They are for those who are not part of our congregations and communities of faith. They are for those "non-Lutherans" as well: Reformed, Baptist, Unitarians, and Catholics. And God's promises are for non-believers as well.

Now what I won't do is tell you that the point of this is that your needs aren't important, or that God views them as lesser in the eyes of the outsider. What I will tell you is that it's human nature to be more focused on our own stuff and issues than the needs of others. It's our tendency to place our own needs above the needs of others.

On this Reformation Sunday, the message that we are justified, not by our actions, but by God's unconditional grace and love alone, is certainly timeless, and is certainly for us. Yet it is also for every other person living in this world today – even those we perhaps think don't merit it, those we would silence like Bartimaeus.

I think if we can remember that – the Gospel, God's promises, and Jesus Christ is for all – perhaps that might change things for us. It is not lost on me that much is changing in the landscape of religious faith and congregations today....the fact someone is reading this because you don't have a pastor is a very visible sign of that. As a congregation you have needs, concerns, cries....and I want you to know God hears them, and that as the days come and go,

God's Reforming spirit makes God's promises known to you in ways that respond deeply to those needs and concerns.

Yet, it is also true that God hears the needs, cries, and concerns of all people. And it has been the ministry of the church – Christ's Body on earth, to speak and embody God's promises to those who sorely need it. Through the church, God's reforming spirit works....it works through each of you.

So, as I conclude my words on this Reformation Sunday, let us be reminded that God is still very much at work! And God, is at work through you. Amen.