

SLD10.30.16 31st Ordinary and Reformation Sunday

EPC

Romans 5:1-5

Jill Oglesby Evans

(based on the Rev. Steve Montgomery's play by the same name)

“Women of the Reformation”

Romans 5:1-5

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

Today we celebrate Reformation Sunday, that autumnal time in the life of the Presbyterian church when we remember together the determined, brave and thoughtful folk of 16th century Europe who, by protesting the abuses and superstitions of the Catholic Church of their day, laid the foundation for the Protestant Reformed Church of today. But since history is generally written not only by victors, but by men, we decided this Sunday to give voice to some of the *women* of the Reformation, who, even if their don't have the recognition of, say, a Luther or a Calvin, a Zwingli or a Knox, yet witnessed and upheld their protestant beliefs even unto death.

In honor of these too often un-named women, today we will hear a dramatic presentation from a few of women of that era whose names **are** remembered, even if rarely mentioned. Our 'readers' theatre' this morning, written by the Rev. Steve Montgomery, pastor of Idlewild Church in Memphis, is based on the work of Roland Bainton, former professor of Church History at the Yale Divinity School and author of many books on the Reformation, including a classic work on Martin Luther, and a three-

volume work entitled “Women in the Reformation.” The conversations, testimonies and examinations we are about to hear are lifted from actual transcripts and letters. Please know that any inflammatory or offensive language came directly from the mouths of churchmen of that era and do not reflect the opinion of current management.

First we’ll hear from **Katherine Zell**, played by Courtney Fetters. As you listen to Zell, consider how ahead of her time she was, and how the more things change, the more they stay the same. Move to Play.

Next we’ll move from **Elizabeth Dirks** played by Lilabet Choate. What little we know about Elizabeth come the transcript of her examination, which you are about to hear. Playing her examiner is Aaron Pratt Shepherd. Play.

Our next witness is **Vittoria Colonna**. We heard from Vittoria last summer as she was one of our scrappy Summer Saints, nominated by Carol Hutton, who will also play her today.

Next we’ll hear from **Anne Askew**, played by Sue Sandell. Anne suffered during the last days of Henry VIII’s reign, at that time when Henry became the head of the Anglican Church. We know about Anne through her writings from prison.

Elizabeth Young, played by Heather Baird, was examined 13 times for heresy in England. The mother of three children, Young traveled to Holland to bring back Protestant books printed there in English. Young’s interrogator will be played by Tony Trauring.

Let’s hear now the voices and experiences of these 5 women of the Reformation whose faith, foresight, intelligence and courage helped shape our tradition and social order in ways not often recorded by historians.

Opens the Women of the Reformation play by the Rev. Dr. Steve Montgomery, pastor of Idlewild Church in Memphis, Tn.

To these women whose testimonies we have heard this morning, as well as to all women and men who have dared over the centuries to challenge the distortions and injustices of the church of their day, we of the reformed church today are indebted. Ours is a denomination ever seeking - through the Lordship of Jesus Christ, our historical tradition, and the controversies of any given day - to discern afresh in every new time and place the Holy Spirit breaking forth with yet more light upon the Word of the living God. Hence the motto of the Presbyterian Church: 'Ecclesia reformata, semper reformandum,' the church reformed, and always being reformed, according to the Word of God' in the power of the Spirit [F-2.02]."

As testified by the women from whom we heard today, such openness to change often requires much courage and faith. And humility. Humility before a God that can never be fully known or described or captured by any of our words or doctrines or revelations. Yet a God who continually reveals the divine self afresh. It can be difficult to accept that we may not, *do not*, at any given time, know all there is to know, that the way things are will not always dictate the way things shall be, that the free-wheeling Spirit has this wild-eyed habit of blowing where She damn well pleases.

What, then, is the task of the faithful? Simply to follow Her lead, with courage, faith and humility, into whatever new frontiers of religious thought, community practice, and Spirit-filled pastors She has in store. Honestly, this church is pretty good at that, which is why we're steppin' out into God's future with such hope.

To the glory of God. Amen.