

So, I have some really, really, really bad news for all of you, all of us, this morning. I hope you're ready for it, because it might be jarring and it might be shocking...you're going to mess up. You're going to mess up *a lot*. I know you want to live a life where you don't make mistakes and it's just not going to happen, it's like the least attainable goal ever. So, really, what I'm trying to tell all of us is the oh so frustrating reality that...we aren't perfect. Not even close really...and honestly, that might be extremely hard to hear, maybe some days more than others, but it doesn't change that it's true. I jokingly said to one of the Bible study folks this week that unfortunately, we aren't Jesus. It's a line I stole from my internship supervisor, whenever someone would get really tangled up in mistakes and frustration or just feeling like they should be able to do things a certain way or at least get a few things right, Tim would look at them and be like, I'm sorry to tell you this, but you ain't Jesus. It made me laugh every time, but it's also really true. We tell ourselves that we need to lead a Christlike life, and don't get me wrong, it's a solid, like legit goal, but at the end of the day, none of us are Jesus...and so...we return to the oh so bad news of the day...none of us are perfect, the mistakes are going to come, and we just kind of have to deal with it.

And I know, you're probably like uh Pastor Tina, this is not news, I'm super well aware of my lack of perfection and my propensity to make mistakes, but here's the thing, we *say* that, but I think sometimes we forget it. I think about how often we tell kids that they're going to mess up, that they're going to make mistakes, and how many times we tell them that it's ok, that it's all part of the process of growing up and figuring things out, but somehow we think this is a message that is exclusive to kids. We want them to be ok making mistakes even though we know deep down in our core that we are so not comfortable making mistakes not that we're fully formed, grown up, put together adults. But let's be real, how many of us are actually grown up? How many of us are actually put together? Not a lot...and so sometimes it feels like we need to pretend our brains are still five years old and needing to hear the reassurance that we're going to make mistakes and mess up and that frankly...that's simply ok.

It seems a little odd to basically say that that right there is the gist of the Reformation, but at its heart, it is. We might as well just say, Lutheranism: telling people it's ok to mess up since 1517. Because that was honestly one of Luther's most fundamental problems. He couldn't wrap his head around the fact that he felt like the world, religion, faith was telling him he had to reach some sort of point of perfection and only then would God

love him, only then would he be saved. He felt like he had to be fixed up and perfect in order to get to a point where God was like, ah, Martin Luther, now you are loveable. And I don't know if we're any different sometimes. It's really hard to take full stock of ourselves, our sins, our mistakes be able to be like, oh yeah, God still totally loves me with all this junk. And so we try to fix and mold and perfect in the hopes that we will someday be deserving of God's love. Y'all, that mentality made Luther *miserable* and it practically drove him out of his mind. Because it's legit impossible. Perfection, sinlessness, no mistakes...it's not possible, because like I said, we aren't Jesus!

Now the reality is, it took Luther being holed up in a monastery doing nothing but studying scripture for him to like fully realize all of this, but luckily for us we have 500 years of all of his work to help us take in one simple fact. God loves your imperfectness. God knows you're going to mess up. God knows you're going to make mistakes. God knows you're going to sin. God loves you, and frankly, there's nothing you can do about it. And I know, all of us are probably going through the laundry list of things in our minds of well, if God knew *that*, if God saw *that*, if God knew I thought *this*...guess what? God does! God pretty much knows everything, kind of the perk of being God, and yet, the answer is still the same. God

loves you and there's nothing you can do about it. And we want to say, but what about this? What about that? And God will just constantly be there being like uh huh, uh huh I know, I love you.

The gift that we celebrate today is that God's love, our salvation...totally and completely out of our hands. And I know, for some of us, that is panic inducing because we want to be able to control everything and understand everything and have it all be logical and make sense, we have to know how we got from point a to point b, but it can also be unbelievably freeing. There are a world of things that we have to control and understand in our lives, there are a world of things we have to earn and fight for, but God's love just isn't one of them. There's nothing to earn, there's nothing to maintain, there's nothing to control...you are loved, that's kind of the end of the story. There's no divine, all-knowing scoreboard in the sky that's keeping tally of all the mysterious, unknowable things that we have to do in order for us to get a green light for salvation. It's not like the gateway of heaven is some turnstile that has to only unlock if you've swiped your card right, like some heavenly Metro system. The doors are open and the scoreboard literally only has to read Jesus 1, the world 0. Everything is already done.

And I know, honestly believing that you are loved is probably the hardest thing to do, but deep down, *that* is the call of faith, to take in that message and trust it, hope in it, and cling to it, because that ardent belief is what is going to draw us out into the world to share that love with others. If we believe it and hold it to be the truest thing we know, then it's going to compel us to want to make sure that *others* know it. Knowing that you are that insanely loved should make you want to do nothing but go out and make sure that the rest of the world feels that same amount of love. And instinctively, we still feel that pull that we're doing those things because it will make us look good in God's eyes. Like ooo, God, check me out, showing love, taking care of others, doing my Christlike thing. But again, it's not earning us any gold stars or moving us up the leader board. It's simply and completely, who we are called to be. We're not trying to earn anything, we're just trying to make our corner of the world a bit more like the kingdom of God, and doing our best to make sure that the people around us know how they are loved with the same kind of love that we cherish.

Honestly, Lutheranism feels like a lot of mental gymnastics to have to maneuver through. The easy road of faith would be to say, here is the list of things you need to do, and if you do them, then you earn points, and here is the final point total you need to get into heaven. Happy working. But we

don't do that!! No no, we wander through all of these grey areas...you don't *have* to do anything, BUT you are called to do something, *however*, you're not doing it for any reason other than it's who you were created to be, and I know that who you were created to be is inherently flawed and imperfect, BUT God thinks that's awesome and loves you completely, and God knows you're going to screw up, and actions have consequences, but one of those consequences is always going to be forgiveness from God, so you've gotta deal with it, but also know you're loved and forgiven all the time. I mean, honestly, people had to have listened to Luther and been like, dude, that is awesome and freeing, but what in the world does that even mean?!

Here's what it means, in this the year of our Lord 2020 which has been arguably one of the hardest years known to man...

You're messy and imperfect.

God cherishes you and loves you unconditionally.

You're going to screw up.

God is always going to forgive you for the screw ups.

You're not going to get everything right all the time.

God's world, God's children needs your heart and your work.

You don't have to earn anything.

God has already done everything.

It's as simple and unbelievably messy as that. At the end of the day, Luther needed to hear that he was loved no matter what, and I think that's all any of us need to hear, on our best days and on our worst days.

Ya know all week...I've had this one image in my head. This image of all of us doing our best Bart Simpson impression of standing in front of a chalkboard constantly writing over and over and over all the things we've messed up. And at first I was like, right, but God's like the divine eraser, who is like nope, all of that's gone, erased, done. But then I remembered the feeling of erasing a chalkboard as a kid, the dust lingers, it settles, it never quite goes away. And I realized God doesn't erase the chalkboard every time we fill it with all the things we've messed up. God just keeps giving us a brand new one each time, fresh, new, no dust of the past, just a clean slate every time. Just waiting and waiting for the day when we finally stop writing all the reasons God doesn't or shouldn't love us, and when we finally look at that board and just start writing over and over and over and over again...God loves me. God loves me. God loves me. God loves me. So...my dear fellow Reformation people...God has put a new chalkboard in front of you, brand new, clean slate. What are you going to write on it?

**AMEN!!!**