

## Thought for the Week 25<sup>th</sup> October 2020

1 John 1:5-10

<sup>5</sup>This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.

<sup>6</sup>If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth.

<sup>7</sup>But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

<sup>8</sup>If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

<sup>9</sup>If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

<sup>10</sup>If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.

One of the traditions of Halloween is dressing up in a costume. It used to be just children who did it when they went out “Trick or Treating,” but now you can get all sort of costumes for adults as well. Putting the words “Halloween costume” into Amazon gets you over 70,000 hits! One of the great things about dressing up is that, for a while at least, you can pretend you are someone else! It’s something we human beings have been doing for a very long time. Sometimes it’s just too hard dealing with who we are so it’s just easier to pretend to be something we aren’t.

That’s exactly the way it was in the church about 500 years ago when the Reformation took place. This is Reformation Sunday because it was on 31<sup>st</sup> October 1517 that Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses (or objections) to the door of the Church in Wittenburg where he was a monk. Through his study of scripture and particularly Paul’s letter to the Romans, Martin Luther had come to realize that there was a big problem in the church of his day. In order to get to heaven they had come to believe that you really had to deserve it, and the only ones who deserved it were those who were perfect.

Now - how many of you here in church today are perfect, who have never done anything wrong. No hands up? That statistic has been the same since Adam and Eve. Since no-one deserved it, there developed three kind of people in the church... 1) those who pretended to be perfect 2) those who worked their socks off trying to be perfect or trying to pay for their sins and 3) those who wrote a really big cheque to the church to be certified “perfect.”

Martin Luther did not pretend to be perfect, nor did he ever write a really big cheque to the church (he was a monk after all)... so guess which category he fell into. He worked his socks off trying to be perfect and trying to ask for forgiveness for every little sin he ever committed. In fact, one day while he was in the confessional for the 4<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> time, the priest said, “*please stop wasting my time and come back when you have a ‘real’ sin to confess!*” But Luther lived in constant fear of hell and judgment, and became depressed as he failed time and time again to be anywhere near perfect.

But then, Luther began reading the Holy Scriptures, studying them diligently – which was something people had got out of the habit of doing in those days – they just accepted whatever the church leadership said they had to do. The light really dawned on Luther when he read from the book of

Romans, where Paul puts it in plain language when he writes:, *“There is no difference between people. Because all people have sinned, they have ALL fallen short of God’s glory.”*

And he read our scripture text for today:

*1 John 1:5-10* <sup>5</sup>*This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.* <sup>6</sup>*If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth.* <sup>7</sup>*But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.* <sup>8</sup>*If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.* <sup>9</sup>*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.* <sup>10</sup>*If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.*

Verse 8 stuck out for him: *“If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.”*

Luther discovered that many people in the church were wearing masks, and it wasn’t because of coronavirus. It was as if they were living their lives in costume trying to hide their imperfections, trying to be something they were not. Pretending to be something they are not. And he realized how very dangerous this was, so Luther had to take a stand.

And so it was, on October 31<sup>st</sup> 1517 that Martin Luther proclaimed to the entire world that we needed to stop deceiving ourselves, that no matter what we do, we cannot hide our sin and we cannot earn or pay our way into heaven. And people began to hear the real gospel of Jesus Christ. It is a gospel that is as true today as it was 2000 years ago. We fall down, and Jesus picks us up... every single time.

Sin is one thing that connects us all. Whether it was 2000 years ago, 500 years ago... or today, we’re all in the same boat – we’ve fallen. The good news is that our salvation does not depend upon us... it rests in God and God alone. 1 John 1 9-10, *“<sup>9</sup> If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. <sup>10</sup> If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.”*

We aren’t perfect people... we all have flaws... we all fall short... and no costume can cover that up. We need Christ. This is the message that Jesus tried to teach his followers 2000 years ago, it is the message that the reformers used to launch a reformation 500 years ago, and it is the same message that we need to remember today. The tragic mistake that we still make is to think that we can take care of the problem ourselves. 500 years after the reformation there is still the temptation to think we can earn God’s favour or maybe even buy it. But when we think like that it’s as if we are coming to church in costume... dressed up as somebody else. We wear masks... hiding ourselves from others... trying to hide ourselves from God.

The thing that we need to remember... is the same thing that the reformers championed 500 years ago... THE truth: that while we were sinners, Christ died and rose from the dead to give us a relationship with God. While we were STILL YET sinners... Christ died for us! We do not have to come to church in costume. We do not have to hide ourselves from God.

We need to hear that again and again. We need to remember that. We need to remember the true power of all that God has done for us, we need to know all that he continues to do for us. He has set

us free! He has set us free from sin, free from bondage... and free from all the silly games that we thought we had to play to earn God's favour.

This week children (and adults) all over the country will be dressing up in costume (as far as the coronavirus restrictions allow). Some might even manage a bit of "trick or treating." As you come to church today, know that you don't need any costume to receive the treat that God has for you, and that this is no trick. Christ died for you, and he wants you to receive forgiveness and live eternally with him... and with the Father. So shed your costume... come as you are to Christ... and receive the treat that is eternal life in Christ.

## Topics for Prayer

### Sunday 25 October

- **Moderator** | *Pray for the Moderator as he takes the service in Dromore (Banbridge Road) Presbyterian Church on Sunday and that, despite current restrictions, the gift of harvest might be celebrated. Remember him also as he prepares online greetings and encouragement for congregations.*
- **Prayer in worship** | *Ask God to enable those who lead in prayer at worship today to help congregations to appreciate God and approach him together for needs great and small.*

### Monday 26 October

- **Lebanon** | *PCI partners with the Near East School of Theology, which trains pastors and church workers for ministry in the Middle East. Pray for NEST's work as they continue to minister and rebuild following extensive damage caused to their building by the Beirut explosion.*
- **Jordan** | *Jordan Evangelical Theological Seminary trains and equips students to serve the Church in the Middle East and North Africa. Pray for JETS, for health and protection for staff and students and that they would remain effective in ministry training despite Covid-19 restrictions.*

### Tuesday 27 October

- **Forces chaplaincy** | *Pray for the staff of the Armed Forces Chaplaincy Centre, who have a pivotal role in developing chaplains across all three Services (Royal Navy, Army, Air Force). Military chaplaincy is a vital ministry; please pray for parish ministers considering God's call to this ministry.*
- **Forces chaplaincy** | *PCI has 11 ministers currently serving the Forces. Pray for Rev Colin Jones who has recently returned to Chaplaincy service, for strength to cope with the pace of life at the frontline. Pray also for chaplains' families, as chaplaincy often requires prolonged service away from home.*

### Wednesday 28 October

- **Global mission workers: Flemings** | *Pray for the Flemings, currently based in Northern Ireland but still serving with United Mission to Nepal and Kathmandu International Study Centre. Pray for good communication despite time differences and distance.*

- **Global mission workers: Lockwoods** | *Pray for the Lockwoods, serving in Kathmandu with UMN. Pray for safety of staff and smooth functioning of the two UMN hospitals as well as safety for the UMN staff who have recently been able to return from home-working to working in cluster offices.*

## Thursday 29 October

- **Home Mission congregations** | *There are 74 PCI home mission congregations throughout Ireland. Praise God for what he is doing in these churches. Thank him for those who are faithful to these congregations.*
- **Home Mission ministers** | *Pray for the ministers who lead these congregations, who often have more than one charge. Pray for wisdom and perseverance as they minister, often in isolated areas*

## Friday 30 October

- **Social Witness** | *Give thanks for those working tirelessly to safeguard our children, young people and adults at risk. Give thanks for the technology that makes it easier to keep in touch during this Covid-19 crisis. Pray that the same protections will be in place in the virtual contact, as is afforded in our face-to-face contact.*
- **Public Affairs** | *As we complete our first week of the new restrictions here in Northern Ireland, pray for all those affected, particularly those in schools, and also for those charged with the responsibility of making and implementing the decisions throughout the island of Ireland.*

## Saturday 31 October

- **General Council** | *Pray for the Standing Committee of the General Council as they interpret and apply the ever-changing government guidance as it affects the Presbyterian Church. Pray that the decisions made, although challenging, will be the best for the life of the Church.*
- **Union Theological College** | *Ken Brown, College Bursar, retires today. Give thanks for the service that he has given over the past six years. Pray for him that he will know God's blessing and guidance in retirement.*