

**Reformation Sunday/30<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time/October 26, 2014**

**Deuteronomy 34:1-12; Matthew 22:34-46**

**Rev. Joel M. Krueger**

*“John Knox”*

*“The sword of justice is God’s, and if princes and rulers fail to use it, others may!”*

I am John Knox, the great Reformer of Scotland!

I was born in 1514 - which makes me 500 years old this year! And to celebrate, I have come to preach to you good people of Belfast, Maine, a town first settled by good, hearty Scotch-Irish folk, the same kind of common people I sought to save from the atrocities of corrupt religious authority! Now, it has been said that I advocated violence and revolution. And, well, this is true! But before you judge me, let me tell you my story. *(Go to pulpit)*

My aim was always to obey God and God alone. Just as Luther, and Zwingli and Calvin and the other Protestant Reformers before me did, I would adhere to the **teachings of the Bible** and the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Nothing else, no temporal authority, no king or queen, no bishop or cardinal, no one, nothing had any greater demand upon me than my God!

Now, when I would **preach**, I would read very calmly the Word of God and teach of its meaning for an half hour or so. But when I began to apply the Word to our **Scottish situation**, it was said I would become *“active and vigorous”* and violently **pound the pulpit!** Today, for you, I will try to contain myself.

In our **gospel** today, Jesus makes it clear. **Love God and only God with all that you are.** Nothing else comes before God. And that is what the disciples did and what they taught. And that is what the Kirk, the church, should do and teach as well.

But in the **early 1500s**, when I was young, this was not the case. In Scotland the church was **corrupt**. More than half of all the land in the country was owned by the Catholic Church. It took in an annual income of more than 18 times that of the crown! Now remember, this is not the Catholic Church of your day. It was a very different time and a very different era. **Bishops and priests** were often appointed for their **political** connections, not for their **purity of heart** and many were immoral in their living. Some, including the Archbishop of St. Andrews, **Cardinal Beaton**, openly consorted with **concubines** and had children by them.

So, you can understand that we had **little respect** for the church then. Yet, my family encouraged me to attend school and I studied **theology**, as this was the custom for those seeking an academic education, who were not interested in mercantile or agriculture. But when I was **ordained** in 1536, I chose to become a notary and I tutored the sons of some of the nobility.

Now, in those days, because there was so much sea traffic coming to Scotland from Europe, we were getting news and information about the **reform movements in Germany and Switzerland**. Many began to learn of **Martin Luther** and others and of their teachings and this began to influence people’s minds about the church.

Some within **Scotland** began to preach these new teachings. **George Wishart** was one such man. When I met him, I was deeply impressed and decided to associate with him. I even became one of his **body guards** and carried a sword. Wishart was a **kind, gentle and peace loving man** and he strove to keep the local lairds and nobles restrained from violent means. But we indeed were doing something new in the land. We would come to a church, our band of **50 or so armed men**, and instead of the Latin Mass, the people would hear an **hour long sermon** preached to them based on the gospel, **in our own language**.

**Wishart** knew he would be **captured** by the authorities at some point and he was right. He

peacefully turned himself in, and **I desired to go with him**. But he said, "*Nay, return to your bairns (children) and God bless you. One is sufficient for a sacrifice.*" He was sentenced as a **heretic**, strangled and **burned at the stake** by **Cardinal Beaton**. Just one of many **martyrs** for the Protestant Church. In response to this atrocity, 16 noblemen attacked the castle at St. Andrew's and assassinated the Cardinal. They took control of the castle and I would later join them there.

It was there at St. Andrews that I was asked to be their **chaplain** and to preach for them but I **refused**. Later, a **preacher** speaking on the necessity of obeying God alone and in following God's will for your life, **pointed at me**, and said, "*You, John Knox, are called to preach!*" The **whole congregation** affirmed his words. I was so moved that I burst into tears and ran out of the room. After a few days away by myself, I realized I must **accept the call**. And so began my career as a preacher. And I realized then, what would become a **chief principle** in our **Presbyterian** structure, as in yours, that **the call to ministry must always be confirmed by the body of believers, God's people**.

But that would have to wait. Because soon, the **French fleets** overran the castle and I along with all the others were taken **prisoner**. I was sentenced to the galleys, rowing the ships. 25 oars, each worked by 6 men. It was a dreadful time and we were harshly treated. After **19 months** I was released to England where **King Edward VI** was making Protestantism the national religion. I was appointed to preach and ultimately was appointed as a **royal chaplain** and preached before the king.

But in 1553 King Edward died. And **Mary Tudor**, also known as "**Bloody Mary**", succeeded him. She was Catholic and was determined to return England to the Catholic Church. I had great difficulty with her and also with other women in power, Mary of Guise, the regent of Scotland and Mary Queen of Scots. Because of their persecution of the Protestants, I had to escape to Europe a number of times.

But that turned out to be fortunate for me as I got to meet **John Calvin** in Geneva, a major influence in the history of **Congregationalism** and of your denomination. Calvin would become a close and trusted friend and I was so impressed with what he was doing in Geneva that I called it "*the most perfect school of Christ that was ever on earth since the days of the apostles.*"

During my second escape to Geneva however, I began to formulate my thoughts concerning both the **role of women** and the **justification of armed revolution** against idolatrous and unholy authorities. There I published my infamous *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*, wherein I said that **women should never govern** because, as scripture shows, God made women to be servants and submissive to men. Well it was **widely read**, and it got me into a lot of **trouble!** I lost many friends and supporters. Even Calvin would not support me in this. And it just so happened then that when Mary Tudor died, **Queen Elizabeth I** took the crown of England. That was good since she was a supporter of the **Protestants**. But because of my writings, **she hated me**.

I lived in a **terrible** time. A time of violence and upheaval and uncertainty. But I was fortunate to have the chance to effect so much change, to be **God's instrument**. To move people by my **preaching**, to write a **history** of my times, to help write the *Book of Common Order*, a *Confession of Faith* and the *First Book of Discipline* and to lay the groundwork for the **Presbyterian Church** and the **faith of the Scottish** people. I never saw myself as a good or great man, but knew my own sins and shortcomings.

But in all things **I relied upon** the grace and mercy of God. I tried to live just as I taught, that **God alone is Lord of the individual conscience** and that we are **beholden** to none else but **God and God alone**. May we live as Christ Jesus directed, to *love the Lord our God, with all our heart and all our soul and all our mind!* And that we must *love our neighbor as ourselves*. Herein lies the **true sword of justice!** Amen.