

The Priesthood of All Believers
 (A First-Person Sermon Monologue
 on Huldreich Zwingli [1484-1531])
 Ephesians 2:1-10 (TEV)
 January 25, 2009 – Heritage Sunday
 Oakland Avenue PCUSA
 Rock Hill, South Carolina
 James T. Richardson

Ephesians 2:1-10 (Today's English Version):

- 1 *In the past you were spiritually dead because of your disobedience and sins.*
- 2 *At that time you followed the world's evil way; you obeyed the ruler of the spiritual powers in space, the spirit who now controls the people who disobey God.*
- 3 *Actually all of us were like them and lived according to our natural desires, doing whatever suited the wishes of our own bodies and minds. In our natural condition we, like everyone else, were destined to suffer God's anger.*
- 4 *But God's mercy is so abundant, and His love for us is so great,*
- 5 *that while we were spiritually dead in our disobedience He brought us to life with Christ. It is by God's grace that you have been saved.*
- 6 *In our union with Christ Jesus He raised us up with Him to rule with Him in the heavenly world.*
- 7 *He did this to demonstrate for all time to come the extraordinary greatness of His grace in the love He showed us in Christ Jesus*
- 8-9 ***For it is by God's grace that you have been saved through faith. It is not the result of your own efforts, but God's gift, so that no one can boast about it.***
- 10 *God has made us what we are, and in our union with Christ Jesus He has created us for a life of good deeds, which He has already prepared for us to do.*

My name is **Huldreich Zwingli**, and I have returned from the past to tell you my story with the hope that you will be drawn closer to the living God. It is my prayer that you will be able to understand me clearly, because not only was I a native of Switzerland and not South Carolina, but I was born over 500 years ago, and I am sure that both the patterns and manners of speech have changed a great deal since that time.

Since most of you present here this morning probably trace your religious heritage through Europe and western Christendom, you should recall that following the days that Jesus lived on this earth, the Christian faith spread around what was then known as “**the Mediterranean world.**” After several centuries, the Church at Rome became the dominant congregation in the Mediterranean world, and the Church at Rome was seen as the leader of Christendom.

As a matter of fact, the Church at Rome was the major religious influence all the way up until **the 11th century** when the church split.

What your forbears followed and what you know as **the Roman Catholic Church** came to be known as **Western Christendom**, and it used the **Latin language** in its liturgy, in its worship services.

The other part of the church became known as **the Orthodox Church** and came to be known as *Eastern Christendom*. It used the **Greek language** in its liturgy, in its worship services.

I am sure that you are well aware that there is still today a **Roman Catholic Church**, congregations of which are scattered all around you, and an **Eastern Orthodox Catholic Church**. The closest “Orthodox Church in America” to you is in Charlotte.

Now, I, **Huldreich Zwingli**, was born in 1484 in Switzerland, just a few years before Christopher Columbus found where you live. By the time of my birth the **Roman Catholic Church** had developed into one of the great institutions of the world. The Bishop of Rome had become the most powerful Bishop in the Church, and thus, the Bishop of Rome became the **Pope** or the “Papa” or “the Holy Father.”

In the 11th century **Pope Gregory VII** claimed to be the Representative of God on earth, and by the thirteenth century **Pope Innocent III** became the most powerful man on earth. Kings and emperors did his bidding, and no one dared to contradict him.

What you have come to call THE MIDDLE AGES, that period in European history between the barbarian conquests and the Renaissance and the Reformation, had many noble Christians and brilliant scholars. Monasteries, which had been founded centuries earlier, became the repositories of learning and education. The palaces of bishops of the church became centers of education and culture.

But all was not well with the Roman Catholic Church.

- (1) Church leaders became corrupted with the things of the world and with immoral sexual conduct.
- (2) Monasteries were tempted **to** own more and more property and **to** keep its learning from the rest of the world.
- (3) Worship began to center in superstition and mystery which kept the common people in ignorance and in dependency upon the parish priests.

An Englishman named **John Wycliff (1320 – 1364)** came to be called “*the morning star of the Reformation*” because of his early attacks upon papal infallibility and the sale of indulgences. He was condemned to death and after he died by strangulation his body was burned at the stake.

Another Englishman, **William Tyndale (1484-1536)**, was also condemned by the church and burned at the stake because he dared to print the New Testament in English so that the common people in England could read the Bible for themselves.

One of the things that I, **Huldreich Zwingli**, had in common with the Englishman, William Tyndale, was that we were both born in the same year, 1484. However, I was born, not in England, but in the high mountains of Switzerland which you know as the Alps. Born the son of a shepherd, I was fortunate through the providence of God to become an educated man, and in 1506, three years before the birth of your John Calvin,

I was ordained a priest in the Roman Catholic Church.

I must tell you that the experience that led to my becoming a priest is also the experience which led to my difficulties with the Roman Church. It all centered in the providence of God placing in my hands a copy of the New Testament. Before that, I had been religious only in attending Mass in a language which I could not understand. But when I read the New Testament, I found the good news which it contained as a means of liberating our people from superstition and ignorance, and so I felt called by God to preach the good news. Reading the New Testament made me feel as my mission the imperative to get the people of my land to read the Bible for themselves and thus to discover the road to salvation as it is revealed in Scripture.

In the year 1519 when I was 35 years of age, the City of Zurich, Switzerland, appointed me to be the Preacher in their great cathedral. In those days, men and women were yearning for release from the burden of their sins because the Roman Catholic church had placed such an emphasis upon all of the negatives of life. When I told the people in my sermons that they could obtain release from the burden of their sins simply by accepting God's free gift of forgiveness through Jesus Christ, and not through some ecclesiastical system of record-keeping, they rejoiced; and a new spirit and a new life came to the city of Zurich!

It was as if clean, fresh air came pouring into the city! Soon, old religious beliefs and practices were being discarded. Tested by the Bible, the new standard of truth, such things as

- (1) the supreme authority of the pope,
- (2) the worship of saints,
- (3) fasts and pilgrimages,
- (4) sales of indulgences or remissions of sins,
- (5) belief in purgatory or a way-station between earth and heaven, and
- (6) the magic of worship in the Mass where a priest changes bread and wine into the body and blood of Jesus,

all had to be done away-with because no warranty could be found for them in the Bible!

Perhaps I should pause long enough here in telling you my story to remind you of the two real GIANTS of the Reformation about whom you probably already know a great deal: MARTIN LUTHER and JOHN CALVIN.

While I was busy in Zurich, Switzerland, another Roman Catholic priest named Martin Luther was active in Germany. Born in 1483, one year before I was born, Luther early studied for a career as a lawyer. But he was tormented by his religious nature, and he sought to find his eternal peace by becoming an Augustinian Monk. While in a monastery, Luther (1) became ordained as a Priest, (2) returned to the University and obtained his Doctor's Degree in Theology, and (3) became a professor of theology in the newly established University of Wittenberg. Not only was Martin Luther a popular preacher to the University community, but he was also a district Vicar of the Augustinian Order with eleven monasteries under his care.

But, Martin Luther was not happy or at peace as a monk. He found that he could not love a God who operated on a legalistic basis of indulgences and points of merit from vigils, prayer, readings, and other acts of penance for sin. Luther lived a life of **dread** because, in not being able to love God, Luther feared that he had committed the unpardonable sin.

Relief came to Martin Luther at long last when he discovered through intense Bible study the true meaning of the doctrine of justification by faith-----**that God feely forgives and receives us into His fellowship, as though we were righteous, through faith in Jesus Christ.** That is exactly what that passage from Ephesians which was read just a few minutes ago was all about! Do you believe it?

The rest is history. In 1517, in reaction to Pope Leo X's ordered sale of indulgences, or pardons for sin (the proceeds of which were to pay for the building of St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome), Martin Luther posted his 95 theses, or points that he wished to debate, on the door of the church in Wittenberg. With the relatively new invention of the printing press, these 95 points of debate were scattered across Germany and much of the Roman Catholic Church. The sale of the indulgences dropped sharply, and the Pope was furious. How was he to pay for the building of St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome?

In 1519, in a debate in Leipzig, Germany, Luther acknowledged that he could no longer accept the authority of the Pope and that he would take his stand then, and in the future, on the sole authority of the Bible.

The next year, in 1520, a papal bull or special degree was issued from Rome excommunicating Martin Luther and sentencing him to be burned at the stake. In the providence of God, in 1525 at the age of 42, Martin Luther married a former Roman Catholic nun named Catherine von Bora with whom he had six children before his death in 1546.

Another GIANT of the Reformation about whom you know a great deal is your own fore-father in the faith, JOHN CALVIN.

In 1509, when I was 25 years old and beginning my work as a Roman Catholic Priest, JOHN CALVIN was born in Noyon, France, and early trained by the Roman Catholic church to become a lawyer. However, in 1533, John Calvin was so influenced by the teachings of the new reformed movement in the church that he experienced what he called a "**sudden conversion.**" Exactly what that was, Calvin never explained, but it was of such a great import that when persecution broke out in France against the reformers, Calvin had to flee for his life to Switzerland.

Much of the next three years was spent in a pillar-to-post existence with Calvin traveling under an assumed name, living with friends in hiding, and doing a great deal of thinking and writing. In 1536 John Calvin published the first edition of a little six chapter book on theology which he entitled The Institutes of the Christian Religion.

He later expanded that book into a two volume set of eighty chapters!

With that book, John Calvin became the spokesman for most of the major theologians of the Reformation and the book became the most important textbook of the Reformation.

One day on a journey to Strasburg, Switzerland, where Calvin hoped to find a home, he spent the night in an inn in Geneva, Switzerland. In Geneva, there was a fiery reformer named **William Farel** who had spearheaded the Protestant efforts in that city, and when he heard that the very famous John Calvin was staying the night in Geneva, William Farel went immediately to confront Calvin with an invitation to remain in Geneva. Calvin, of course, did not want to remain in Geneva but instead sought the quietness of Strasburg where he could continue his work as a scholar and theologian.

William Farel told John Calvin that if John Calvin persisted in his attempt to leave Geneva, John Calvin was flirting with the eternal damnation of his soul! In other words that may be more familiar to you South Carolinians might understand, William Farel told John Calvin that if he did not do what Farel was suggesting then Calvin would go to hell!

John Calvin told the story himself:

“Then, Farel, finding he gained nothing by entreaties, besought God to curse my retirement and the tranquility of my studies if I should withdraw and refuse to give assistance when the necessity was so urgent. By this imprecation I was so struck with terror that I desisted from the journey I had undertaken.” (Lingle, Walter L. and Kuykendall, John W., Presbyterians: Their History and Beliefs, Atlanta, John Knox Press, 1978, p. 23)

The years that followed with John Calvin in Geneva greatly effected the Reformation and the start of what you have come to know as your Presbyterian Church.

Calvin’s theology and writings influenced the world in matters of education and politics in such a manner that your American society is what it is today. Physically not a strong person, John Calvin died in 1564 of a variety of illnesses and disease at the age of 55.

And while Martin Luther lived to what was the ripe old age in those days of 63,

I, Huldreich Zwingli, died at the age of 47, being killed in a war between Roman Catholic and Protestant armies over the issue of who was to control certain counties or districts in Switzerland.

NOW, LISTEN TO THIS!

“**The priesthood of all believers**” was one of the major Protestant, evangelical doctrines on which **Martin Luther** and **John Calvin** and **I, Huldreich Zwingli**, agreed!

The doctrine of “the priesthood of all believers” said simply that in God’s grace there was no hierarchy of good, better, and best between levels of religious (monks and nuns) and

clergy and lay people (such as most of you are). In the eyes of God, and because of the grace of Jesus Christ, **we are all priests!**

Luther, Calvin, and I also agreed on the doctrines of **justification by faith** and **the sole authority of Scripture**.

The one place that we all could not agree was in our differing conceptions of Holy Communion, or the Lord's Supper.

ROMAN CATHOLICS believed that in the sacrament the bread and wine were **miraculously changed in their substance** to the body and blood of Jesus.

MARTIN LUTHER believed that in the sacrament the Lord's body and blood **came to be in, with, and under the elements of bread and wine** so that in the sacrament the worshiper partook of both bread and wine **and** the body and blood of Jesus.

JOHN CALVIN and you Presbyterians held that in the sacrament there was a **"real presence" of Jesus (1) in the gathering of the believers, and (2) in the life of each believer present**.

And I, HULDRICH ZWINGLI, looked upon the sacrament **simply as a memorial feast** in which bread and wine were only symbols of the body and blood of Christ.

So, you see, there is much that you 21st century Christians have to celebrate today in terms of your history and your theology. But the sad thing is that even 500 years after the Protestant Reformation in Europe, Christians from

ST. ANNE'S ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH
and
GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH
and
OAKLAND AVENUE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
and
ROCK HILL FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

cannot sit down together at the Lord's Supper and experience the sacrament together.

PERHAPS IT IS TIME FOR YOU TO BEGIN ANOTHER REFORMATION?