

Pastor Keith E. Wiens  
Text: Romans 3:21-25

October 25, 2009  
Reformation Sunday

### A TIME TO CONFESS

I want you to know that something very significant is happening this weekend. Four young people are publicly committing their lives to Jesus Christ. And I tell you, this is very significant! We might be tempted to overlook the significance of this event. After all, the church has been confirming people for centuries. But I tell you, this is significant.

Just look at what is happening. We live at a time in history when secularism is on the rise. Gone are the days when most people in this country were Christian. Today the competition for the hearts and minds and lives of people, and especially of young people, is more intense than it has ever been. So much so that today one out of every five young people claims to be an atheist or agnostic.

Extremely strong forces are pulling people away from the Christian faith. Parents, and even Christian parents, often give in to these forces. Christian parents are not as diligent in bringing their sons and daughters to church as they used to be. Twenty years ago it was almost a given that every young person in the church would be confirmed. That is no longer true.

I say all of this, not to moan and groan about the current state of affairs, but to underscore how remarkable it is what these four young people are doing. And I tell you, we all need to follow their example!

It is also significant that these young people are being confirmed on Reformation Sunday. This is the day we remember how the world was shook up in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. And it all started when a young priest named Martin Luther stood up and publicly confessed his faith in Jesus Christ.

On October 31, 1517, this priest, who was also a university professor, nailed 95 theses on the church door in Wittenberg, inviting other scholars to debate. He questioned some of the things the church was doing - like demanding that people pay money in order to have their sins forgiven.

Luther objected to this. From his studies of the Bible, he had learned that God freely forgives sin for the sake of Christ. He had learned that the way we become right with God is through faith in Jesus Christ, not by paying money or by doing good works. The Bible readings we heard today were among those which helped him to see this radical truth.

And this truth gave him the courage to publicly confess his faith. Luther's confession got him into a lot of trouble, but he was convinced that people needed to hear the truth. And the truth is this: we are made right with God through faith in Jesus Christ.

The greatest challenge facing the church today is for the people of the church to boldly confess this truth. We need people to follow the example of Luther and countless other Christians down through the ages. We need people to follow the example of these four young people today. The world needs to hear from us.

They need to hear that we all sin and fall short of what God expects. They need to hear that God loves them, in spite of their sin. They need to hear the story of Jesus, how Jesus sets them free from their sins through his death and resurrection and gives them life with God. The story of Jesus is a life-changing story. It is a story these four young people who are confessing their faith today have heard. And their lives are different because of this story.

The story of Jesus is a story of one who was born in humble surroundings and baptized in the river Jordan. It is the story of one who went about teaching people to know God and inviting people to trust God. It is the story of one who was sentenced to death and hung on a cross to die. It is the story of one who rose from the dead, returned to life, and promised to give life to all who follow him. It is this life which the world desperately needs, a life the world is hungry for, a life the world is frantically trying to find.

This life comes from Jesus. It is not something we have to buy or achieve. It is a free gift. As the reading from Romans declares, "they are now justified by God's grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." This gift becomes effective through faith. Faith turns on the power of this gift and changes peoples lives.

Luther's proclamation of this good news turned the world upside down in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and our proclamation of this good news can turn the world upside down in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. More than ever the world needs us to stand up and confess our faith in Jesus Christ.

What these four young people are doing is very significant. I am thankful for their faith. I am thankful for their courage. I am thankful for their witness. I am thankful for their example. Let us all go and do likewise.