

Reformation Sunday – October 25, 2015
Text: Romans 3:19-28
Theme: The Law and Coffee Makers

Some of you are from the generation who lived through the Great Depression. My parents were such people and they never threw out anything. When my mom moved in with us we cleaned out her house, every square inch of usable storage space in the kitchen was filled with plastic containers that she had washed and saved. I also found, stuffed in the very back corner of the cabinet, the old stove top coffee percolator that she had not used since sometime in the 1970's when Mr. Coffee made his debut. She had moved that beat up old percolator from North Carolina to Chicago, to Seattle, to Arizona, to Alabama, back to Arizona, and back to Seattle. I said, "Mom! Why have you lugged this thing around? You haven't used it in almost 30 years!" And she said, "Well, that percolator served your dad and me for more than 20 years before your father insisted on buying that Mr. Coffee I just couldn't throw it out."

St. Paul spells it out nicely in Romans. What the law says speaks to those under the law. Therefore, the law is not speaking to us. We are not under the law. We are not slaves to the law. We live our lives under Grace. What that means is that while the law is useful to us, it does not imprison us. It cannot force us to do anything, to make any choices, to follow any paths. Many Christians have a very difficult time grasping that. Many people fundamentally

believe that if you make enough rules, you can control behavior. Every thinking person will scoff at that idea because every thinking person knows that rules will not truly change behavior. And then they will turn right around and make a rule! We do that because we do not trust God. We don't really believe that the Gospel has set us free and we are free indeed. We secretly believe that we are at the mercy of the Law and so we make certain that everyone else is too!

It's not that the law is of no use to us. It is of remarkable use, but there is a difference between a tool and a craftsman. We are the craftsmen. The Law is the tool. For instance, the kids got Dänya a Keurig coffee maker for Mother's Day. Now that coffee maker is a very useful and convenient tool for making a cup of coffee but I feel no compunction to use it. It's just one more tool in the kitchen. If I decide to use my French press one day, I feel no allegiance to the Keurig. I feel no guilt or shame over not using the Keurig. And if for some reason the doctor said we couldn't drink coffee anymore, I wouldn't think twice about throwing it out or giving it away. I would not treat it like my mother treated her stove-top percolator. I would not haul it around the country because it had once been a useful tool. That's just how the law of God is for us. It is a helpful and convenient tool for helping us to live joyful and productive lives but when we violate it, we need feel no guilt or shame. Because the law

holds no threat for us. It is just a tool. It has nothing to do with our salvation and in fact, on the day of resurrection, we will throw it out because it will be of no more use to us at all. Once we are perfected, the Law will be an obsolete tool, as obsolete as my mother's percolator. The Gospel, on the other hand is never obsolete. The Gospel is the good news that Jesus Christ died on the cross and suffered Hell to set us free from the Law. When we confuse the Law and the Gospel we end up with something that does us no good. The Gospel is emptied of its power and the Law becomes a tyrant instead of the servant because we are elevating a simple tool above the promise of God.

The Reformation was aimed at reforming this very problem. Luther saw that the people of God did not understand the freedom of the Gospel and were in constant terror for their souls. They were asking the question, "Have I done enough to be saved?" That is a ridiculous question. Jesus did everything necessary for your salvation when he died on the cross and he created faith in you at your baptism to grasp his gift to you of grace.

"...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus...." Everyone is saved the same way and no one can save himself. That said, stop thinking of the law as your master and

grab ahold of it like a tool. It is a useful tool, so use it! Where you have broken it, repent, that is turnaround from that path and stop breaking it not because you are afraid of damnation, but because failing to use a good tool is stupid and reduces the joy you can have in your life. You wouldn't dig a hole with your bare hands when there is a perfectly good shovel sitting right there beside you right? Use the law to increase the joy in your life and revel in the Gospel that gives you salvation regardless of how well you use the law. That's the message of the Reformation. It is an amazing message. We are free and we are saved. We don't have to lug our stove-top percolators through life. We also do not have to lug around guilt and shame over breaking the law.