

REFORMATION II

The Second Reformation – Sunday, October 31, 2010 – on the 493rd anniversary of the posting of the Thesis of Martin Luther
Reclaiming the Fundamentals of The Way

by Douglas C. Sloan

The Way is to...

- ✚ live the sacred life – here and now – of the one universal Good News message as the Kingdom of God.
- ✚ worship God, who has never been, at any time for any reason, a capricious God of death, war, murder, destruction, violence, abuse, vengeance, hate, fear, lies, slavery, systemic injustice, oppression, conditional acceptance, exclusion, segregation, discrimination, shunning, ostracism, eternal condemnation, eternal punishment, retribution, sacrifices, patriarchy, matriarchy, empire, nationalism, one culture, one race or portion of the population, parochialism, sectarianism, dogma, creeds, pledges, oaths or censorship – and who has never behaved as a Greco-Roman or narcissistic deity.
- ✚ worship God, who is singular, solitary, nonmaterial, immanent, transcendent – the sacred and ultimate reality, the divine mystery, the more – and who has always been a consistent God of life, peace, creation, truth, healing, rehabilitation, restoration, forgiveness, reconciliation, inclusion, participation, diversity, liberation, justice, resurrection, transformation, love and grace. There are neither multiple nor opposing divine forces or entities or identities or personalities. There is only God.
- ✚ know the grace of God to be unconditional and unlimited – my acceptance by God requires nothing of me.
- ✚ know the love of God: to be unrelenting and unlimited; makes no exceptions and has no qualifications; to be the constant inviting presence of God; and to be the unconditional acceptance by God of me in my entirety as a gift.
- ✚ worship God, whose will is and has always yearned for us to: be free and independent; think; be curious; be intelligent and wise; value knowledge over ignorance and compassion over knowledge; be creative; grow and mature; live long healthy satisfying lives; live non-violently without vengeance; be generous; be hospitable; be compassionate; do no harm; heal and rehabilitate and restore; forgive and reconcile and include all and have all participate; be good stewards of all resources; live here and now as one family; live in a loving intimate relationship with God; be transformed through resurrection; and be the kingdom of God.
- ✚ worship God, who has always been the same and whose character does not change and who is not capricious or abusive or narcissistic. God performs neither miracles nor acts of retribution. God neither saves nor condemns. God has never required and never accepted a sacrifice by anyone for any reason. God desires worship as relationship, not praise or euphoria. God does not preplan or predestine or interfere with the course or end of my life.
- ✚ reject as components or identifying characteristics or requirements of faith and worship and church and Christianity and life and God and Jesus and the Good News message and the Kingdom of God: death, war, murder, destruction, violence, abuse, vengeance, hate, fear, lies, slavery, systemic injustice, oppression, conditional acceptance, exclusion, segregation, discrimination, shunning, ostracism, eternal condemnation, eternal punishment, retribution, sacrifices, patriarchy, matriarchy, empire, nationalism, the superiority of one culture or one race or some portion of the population, parochialism, sectarianism, dogma, creeds, pledges, oaths, censorship, the valuation of thoughts or beliefs or praise or euphoria over justice and service and relationships, and any consideration of post-mortal existence.
- ✚ read and study and remember and share scripture as a sacrament for the experience and presence of God; for inspiration and motivation and contemplation and meditation and spiritual truth and insight and illumination about how God is a presence and influence in my life and to better understand the love and grace of God and to discern how God is calling me forward and beyond my previous understanding of God to a better and more complete and more mature understanding of God and how God is calling me forward to a more loving relationship with others and with God.
- ✚ know the best understanding of scripture requires a scholarly knowledge of the original languages of the scripture and the linguistic devices used in the scripture (cultural assumptions, coded language, humor, sarcasm, hyperbole, poetic metaphor, etc.), of the cultural and historical environment in which the scripture was written, and of the people of that time by whom and for whom the scripture was written.
- ✚ know scripture as the metaphorical and narrative and thoughtful writings by the ancestors of my faith, who recorded their contemporary and historical, personal and cultural perception and understanding of the presence and influence of God in their lives and in the life of their community. While, at most, it can be persuasive or instructional, the scripture is not controlling.
- ✚ know the community of followers of The Way and worship and living the Good News message as the Kingdom of God to be more important than dogma and creeds and land and structures and debt and continuing expenses and material abundance and wealth accumulation and to be more important than pledges and oaths and empire and nationalism and patriotism and citizenship and civic religion and patriarchy and matriarchy and parochialism and sectarianism and political influence and social standing and financial clout.
- ✚ know largess to be more important than largeness and to hold that generosity and hospitality to all is a fundamental element of the Good News message and a defining characteristic of the Kingdom of God.
- ✚ know compassionate service to those who are hurt or lost or oppressed as a fundamental element of the Good News message and a defining characteristic of the Kingdom of God. Service requires partnership between the server and the served. Holy and wholesome service requires that the server be competent and healthy. Service is not slavery, not some form of enforceable servitude, and not an opportunity or a justification for the server to be oppressed or abused.
- ✚ know that as the children of God, we are one family in one place. There are no races, no tribes, no indigenous peoples, no ethnic groups, no castes, no nations, no royalty, no aristocracy, no social classes, no economic classes, no genders, no sexual orientations, no geography, no religions, no denominations, no sects, no churches, no elite, no privileged, no saved, no unsaved, no slaves, no outcasts, no untouchables – none of these are a consideration or a barrier or a limitation to the possession and development and utilization of time and effort and gifts and talents for service to others or participation in the Kingdom of God – there is no “us” and no “them”, no “here” and no “there”, no families other than the one family of all people together in one place as the children of God.
- ✚ know Jesus as: an intelligent compassionate Jewish mystic who had a strong persistent connection to and participation in and understanding of God; who could explain the reality of God to others and introduce them to a personal experience of God and a personal relationship with God; a messenger of the Good News and an example of the Kingdom of God. Because Jesus was effective as a messenger and successful as an example, he was killed. Both in message and self-understanding, Jesus was non-messianic and non-eschatological.
- ✚ know an experience of “the resurrected Jesus” or any other positive divine experience as an experience of the immediate and tangible presence of God, to know with confidence the reality of being and being in and of the Kingdom of God.
- ✚ not regard Jesus as divine or as a sacrifice or atonement or ransom or a substitute for me. The Good News message and the Kingdom of God and the presence and experience of God are what are divine in mortal life. Because of the love and grace of God, sacrifice and atonement and ransom and substitution on my behalf are not required for me to be accepted by God and to participate fully in and as the Kingdom of God.
- ✚ know the reemergence and revitalization of the disciples after the death of Jesus: as the first followers of The Way; as the first Good News resurrection and transformation; as the first example and witness that resurrection and transformation do exist and do not require death as a precedent; as example and witness that resurrection and transformation are available to all; and as example and witness that the Kingdom of God is here and now and active.
- ✚ know baptism, regardless of the method used, as a public act of private intent – to commit to living as a follower of the Good News message by being the Kingdom of God. Other followers are to provide the new follower with tolerance (ideally, acceptance) and the safety of time in a place devoid of condemnation and retribution which is necessary for the new follower to put behind and to put away a past life, to let the previous life die and in its place resurrect a new transformed life and person.
- ✚ know communion, regardless of the frequency it is shared or what elements are used, as a public act of universal unity. We gather at an open table where, without exception and without qualification, all are invited. At an open table, we celebrate and affirm the ever-present life of the Good News message and the ever-present all-inclusive unifying love of the Kingdom of God.
- ✚ proclaim “Jesus is Lord” and mean that I have no other Lord, that no person of any social or political or religious position has dominion over my life. To proclaim “Jesus is Lord” is to take a moral and spiritual stance and to commit an act of radical counter-cultural non-violent defiance of the oppression and systemic injustice committed by empire and civic religion and by individuals who are more interested in power over others than in service to others. My faith is personal. My faith is not a matter of proxy or the authority of others.
- ✚ know that the Good News message is not a loss of my freedom or independence, indeed, it is a much fuller realization of my freedom and independence; is not a forsaking of intelligence or wisdom or knowledge or the search for new knowledge or learning or finding new ways to see reality, or new insights into the workings and purposes of reality, or discovering or creating new visions of what reality could be; is not to forsake seeking or questioning or doubting or examination or reexamination or analysis or reanalysis. The Good News is dynamic, not static; is life, not death, not after death; is growth, not stunted development; is moving forward and moving beyond my current existence and is moving forward and moving beyond my current understanding of my existence and of God.
- ✚ be guided and instructed by the Good News message, which is: God is unconditional boundless grace and unlimited unrestrained love and always has been; God wants to have a loving intimate relationship with each of us without exception and without qualification; seek justice as healing and rehabilitation and restoration; seek universal forgiveness and reconciliation and inclusion and participation; in healthy partnership, compassionately serve all who are hurt or lost or oppressed; be generous and hospitable to all; live non-violently without vengeance and with a cheerful fearlessness of death and worldly powers; and be – here and now – the Kingdom of God. Whatever we do, whatever we are, wherever we are – can never separate us from the love and grace and the surrounding and inviting and welcoming and inclusive presence of God.