

NEW BEGINNINGS LUTHERAN CHURCH

Reformation Sunday - October 27th, (11:11 am)

BACK TO BASICS

Psalm 46

Revelation 14:6-7

Romans 3:19-28

John 8:31-36

The Son of God Has Set Us Free from Sin and Death by His Grace

"Wisdom is justified by her deeds" (Matt. 11:19), and the true Wisdom of God, Christ Jesus, the incarnate Son, has justified us by His deeds. He prepares His way by the preaching of repentance, but He has suffered the violence of the Law and voluntarily handed Himself over to violent men, that we might eat and drink with Him in His Kingdom and "remain in the house forever" (John 8:35). He is "a friend of tax collectors and sinners" (Matt. 11:18-19), and He has rescued us by His grace from the slavery of sin and death. By the proclamation of His eternal Gospel "to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people" (Rev. 14:6), "the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law" (Rom. 3:21), "that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Rom. 3:26). And by the hearing of that Gospel of Christ Jesus, "whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith" (Rom. 3:25), "you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31-32).

The message is based on Romans 3:23-24 and 28, one of the bases for Martin Luther's 95 Theses.

"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... For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law".

On this day, October 31st, 1517, Martin Luther nailed what some have called his "Halloween Bombshell" to the church door in Wittenberg, Germany. It wasn't Luther's intention to cause a major upheaval, yet those hammer strokes would soon echo worldwide and reverberate to this day.

With this act, Martin Luther publicly challenged the Roman doctrine of "indulgences." This doctrine taught that certain acts could shorten a person's time in purgatory, hastening their entrance into heaven. In opposition to this man-made and unscriptural doctrine, Luther preached God's gracious forgiveness of sins—not through relics, papal pardons, or indulgences, but through faith alone in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

There's no question about it: it was the selling of indulgences that most troubled Luther. The Pope at that time, Leo X, wanted to complete St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome, but funds were low. So, he declared that indulgences were to be sold in Germany as a fundraising project.

Chief among these pardon-sellers was a monk named John Tetzel. Initially, Tetzel was warmly received across Germany. He preached about the miraculous power of indulgences, claiming that those who bought one would not only receive forgiveness of sins but would also escape punishment in purgatory.

Tetzel even had a catchy verse he repeated to the people in each town: "As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs."

The result of this unscriptural teaching was that many people believed they didn't need to repent of their sins and trust in Christ alone for salvation. They thought they could sin, buy indulgences to be forgiven, and continue sinning. This misplaced trust in indulgences over Jesus Christ deeply troubled Luther. For him, the issue was clear: souls redeemed by Christ were at stake, and the very Gospel was in jeopardy. Luther was convinced that this practice had the potential to destroy a person's relationship with God.

I include three of Luther's 95 theses here, to give you an idea of what he was saying:

- **Thesis 1: When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, 'Repent,' he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.**

- **Thesis 62: The true treasure of the church is the most holy Gospel of the glory and grace of God.**

Luther came to his understanding of the Gospel suddenly. He said, that when he finally understood God's grace in Christ, it was as if he had been "born again." Before that, he had been tormented by his sins. Before that, he saw Jesus not as a gracious Savior, but as a stern Judge. Tormented by his sins, Luther confessed them frequently, often daily, and for as long as six hours at a time. At that point in his life, he believed that every sin without exception had to be recalled and confessed if it was to be forgiven.

Desperately seeking a way out, Luther hoped that confession would bring him freedom. Instead, it brought only bondage. Luther didn't experience peace because he didn't rightly know the Prince of Peace – Jesus Christ.

The Apostle Paul stated the Gospel clearly when he said... because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ, even when we were dead in transgressions – **it is BY GRACE you have been saved!** This teaching is at the heart of our faith. The Apostle Paul says: ***For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and***

this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works - so that no one can boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

Martin Luther came to understand that salvation is God's free gift of grace to the world. God's grace is unearned, undeserved, unmerited. IT IS TRULY FREE! But, as I have said before, it is certainly not cheap. The greatest blessing anyone can ever receive – the entire forgiveness of all their sins and the promise of heaven someday – IS COMPLETELY FREE. It cost a great deal. Someone paid for it. THAT SOMEONE WAS JESUS CHRIST. Jesus Christ was the only one who could offer his perfect life as payment for our sins.

Martin Luther, studying deeply the bible, realized that **our salvation, that is, our restored relationship with God, doesn't depend on what we do, but on what God has done for us.**

It is hard for us to believe that if we were tested by God in this way, we would have any chance of being saved. And yet, a surprising number of people in our world continue to cling to the false hope that if their good works outweigh their evil works, the locked doors of heaven will swing open.

When the Apostle Paul says that salvation is a free gift, he means exactly that. A dictionary definition of a gift is ... *something voluntarily transferred by one person to another without compensation.*

The Apostle Paul says that we are saved BY GRACE **THROUGH FAITH**. This is not faith in ourselves, or faith in our good works. When the Apostle Paul uses the word "faith," he means a gift given to us by the Holy Spirit at our baptism – if we were baptized as a child. He means the faith that the Holy Spirit sparks in us – if we heard God's word as an adult and let it work in us. At the cross, God the Father transferred the sins of the whole world onto His Son. We deserve only punishment for our sins. Jesus died for our sins, once and for all. And now, by means of His Word and the Sacraments, God transfers the benefits of Jesus' work on the cross to our address.

The sin or human nature hasn't changed down through the ages. And there's nothing we can do to change it. **IN AND THROUGH** HIS SON, however, God offers us the transformation we so badly need – the entire forgiveness of all our sins. His Holy Spirit wants to open our hearts to God's Word.

Once we are members of the family of God, by God's enabling, we can do – and we must do – good works. Not to be saved, mind you. But because we are already saved. The Apostle Paul says: **We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.** (Ephesians 2:10)

A veterinarian recounts an unforgettable wedding anniversary he and his wife celebrated early in their marriage. His boss at the veterinary clinic had encouraged him to take his wife to a fancy restaurant for the occasion. He hesitated; as a young veterinarian, he didn't feel he could afford it. But his boss insisted: **"Go on, it's a special day!"**

Reluctantly, he agreed and surprised his wife with the plan. On their way to the restaurant, they stopped at a farm so he could check on a sick horse. After finishing the exam, he returned to the car and drove to the restaurant—unaware that he had left his checkbook behind in the mud at the farm. When the meal ended, he reached into his pocket to pay and noticed that his checkbook was missing. But the waiter quickly reassured him, saying, "Not to worry; your dinner has already been paid for—by your boss!"

It is exactly what happens regarding our sins and God through Jesus. Our God, in Jesus, has already paid the bill for us. We are saved by grace, by faith in Jesus and, by the mercy of God. The bill is paid! It precisely means that "we are justified by faith apart from works of the law". By grace alone, through faith alone, made known by the Scriptures alone, God's gift of salvation through Jesus Christ is proclaimed and received. **WHAT AN IMMEASURABLE AND ETERNAL GIFT.** Let us celebrate this divine gift each day of our lives and forever. In Jesus' name. Amen.