

## **FAITH ALONE – It’s *Still* All about Jesus!**

Dear Friends in Christ:

The theme our national church body is using for the 500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Reformation contains the tag line: *It’s still all about Jesus. Reformation 2017: It’s still all about Jesus!*” I like that – a reminder that whenever we proclaim *Scripture Alone, Faith Alone and Grace Alone* - the cross is always at the center! It’s still all about Jesus!

What that means then is that the Reformation is not primarily a 500 year old revolt against church doctrines, dogmas and decrees. It means the Reformation is not primarily about a man named Martin Luther, a monk who was struggling to find peace with God while calling the church to faithfulness in Biblical teaching. It means the Reformation is not primarily about a church today that calls itself “*Lutheran.*” No, the Quincentennial celebration of the Reformation is now...as it was 500 years ago...***all about Jesus!*** The Reformation was, and is today, about calling and inviting sinners into a saving relationship with Jesus based on God’s **grace alone...through faith alone!**

Now, to be sure, the Reformation had great political, social, economic and religious impact on the world of its day. It was, as the Luther movie depicts, an “*idea that changed the world!*” But, life change wasn’t original to 1517! No, God changed the world some 2000 years ago on a hill far away where stood an old rugged cross, “*so that whoever believes in Him might not perish but have everlasting life.*” (John 3:16) It was God’s “*idea*” to change the world, confirmed in Bethlehem’s stable, when “*the Word became flesh and*

*dwelt among us, full of grace and truth...and those who believed in his name became children of God!”* (John 1:1, 12-14)

The “*idea that changed the world,*” you see, gets to the heart of the Bible’s prophetic message, God calling and inviting sinners through **Scripture alone** to be His children! Hear again these words of the prophet Jeremiah, God speaking to a wayward and rebellious people: “*I will gather you...and you shall be my people, and I will be your God...and I will make with you an everlasting covenant!*” (Jeremiah 32:36-41) Hear again these life-changing words from the Apostle Paul, the text for today’s message: “*For there is no distinction: 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...to be received by faith.*” (Romans 3:22-25b)  
**Reformation 2017: Yes, it’s still all about Jesus!**

So the question that’s been rolling around in my head and heart and mind this week asks: “*How am I doing in my faith relationship with Jesus?*” “*How are you doing?*” It’s a good Reformation question because one of the things so raw and real about Martin Luther’s faith journey is that he was always trying to “*get God’s love!*” Now, in Luther’s case, it was about appeasing an angry God, doing enough good works, fasting and praying, relying on relics and indulgences, his inner soul tormented until realizing he could never do enough to “*get God’s love!*” God doesn’t declare anyone “*righteous*” because of what they do! Neither Luther, nor we, can “*get*” God’s love, as the prophet Isaiah declares: *We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.* (Isaiah 64:6)

Now, I get that, don’t you? Once we start thinking, “*I’ve got this new life thing down God*” or “*My faith is so strong, God*” or “*See what a good Christian/Lutheran I am, God*” we come up

“short” every time! There is “no distinction,” when it comes to sinners; we are all broken vessels and cracked pots; thinking “it’s about us” and what we do instead of what God has done for us! We mess up royally every day with contradictory deeds and hypocritical attitudes! That’s me – that’s you - “I get that” - and we have to confess our sins every day, turning anew to **Scripture alone**, rejoicing in God’s **grace alone** through **faith in Jesus Christ alone!**

So, let’s unpack Word of God today a little more deeply together because it’s so important, my friends that we “get” it! Read it out loud with me...

*“But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: 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...to be received by faith.”* (Romans 3:22-25b)

OK, let’s go, buckle up, Bible Study 101: “**But now...!**” If you remember a sermon of mine from a few months ago, you know that’s one my favorite Biblical words: “*The wages of sin is death...BUT the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus my Lord.*” (Romans 6:23) Here the word “but” is used in transition from a previous verse which says: “*For by works of the law no human being will be justified in [God’s] sight.*” (Romans 3:20) In other words, we can’t “get God’s love” by what we do, because we’re sinners! That’s the Law, right? You got that? Understand that? Confess that? OK, good, let’s move on.

*But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, [apart from what we do] although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God **through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.*** So, we can’t “get” it on

our own, but God declares us righteous, forgiven, redeemed and loved “*through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.*” It’s not about us – it’s about Jesus! Now that’s good news, right! That’s the Gospel!

So let’s bring it home: *For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are **justified by his grace** [And all good Lutherans would add “**GRACE ALONE!**”] as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus...**to be received by faith.**” [And all good Lutherans would add “**FAITH ALONE!**”]* (Romans 3:21-25b) That’s why we so often sing, “*Just as I am without one plea*” and “*Amazing grace, how sweet the sound!*” **Reformation 2017: Yes, it’s still all about Jesus!**

Once we “*get*” that...once we “*get*” that God’s grace and love is a *gift, received through faith alone* because of what Christ has done for us - then life has a new “*influencer*” – the Holy Spirit living within our hearts, sparking the desire to “*crown Jesus the Lord of our lives!*” By the power of Holy Spirit working through Word and Sacrament, we no longer have to struggle to “*get God’s love!*” We know our sin separates us from him and acknowledge that we are constantly falling short of His glory. But we also believe that Jesus Christ paid the price of sin on Calvary’s Cross and rose on Easter Morn to give everlasting life to all who place their trust and faith in Him! Forgiven and redeemed - **in response to His love** we now seek to “*love the Lord our God with all my heart and to love neighbor as self.*” Our desire as followers of Jesus is to live “*faithfully*” honoring Him with the testimony of our lips and lives, the Holy Spirit producing the “*fruit*” of faith, described in Scripture as “*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.*” (Galatians 5:22-23) Faith alone, you see, is empowering! It’s freeing! It releases the chains of guilt and sin! “*All hail the power of Jesus Name!*” **Reformation 2017: It’s still all about Jesus!**

So, back to the Reformation question: **Do you get it!** How's your faith relationship with Jesus? Martin Luther finally "got it" and he responded: "*The righteous person lives by faith alone! The righteous person lives by faith alone! All at once, I felt I had been born again. Immediately, I saw the whole of Scripture in a different light. This sweetest phrase now for me the very gate of paradise itself: For we hold that a man is justified by faith alone!*" (Martin Luther: The Idea That Changed the World. © 2017 LCMS. Reproduced by permission.)

**Reformation 2017: Yes, it's still all about Jesus!** ...the Savior calling and inviting sinners to new life – a changed life – eternal life - through **faith in Him alone!** How I pray you "**get God's love!**" How can you – how can I – live or die without the hope we have in Christ? How do we cope with sin and death or overcome disappointments and setback without faith in Christ? How do we handle life when things don't go our way; when relationships are strained; when illness strikes or worries pile up like a football tackle, concussing our ability to function with purpose and hope? If we don't "get" God's love in Christ "**through faith alone**" then it means we are simply "**alone**" when the worst stuff we can ever imagine in life happens! And "*stuff happens*" doesn't it?

But it also happened to God's Son, on Calvary's Cross, in the darkness of a tomb, the Savior dying and rising so we might the assurance of everlasting life by **God's grace...through faith alone!** Yes, **Reformation 2017 is still all about Jesus** and His love! How I pray today by the power of the Holy Spirit working through **Scripture alone** that you "get it" - that you "get it" because God loves you so much!

In the Name of Jesus! **AMEN.**

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