

Trinity Lutheran Church, Gillette, WY
October 28, 2007

Hold Fast to the *Solas*

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, amen. The text for the sermon this morning comes from the Epistle which was read earlier.

On November 10, 1483, a woman in Eisleben, Germany, gave birth to her and her husband's first child – a son. The next day, that child was taken to the basement chapel of St. Peter's Church in Eisleben to be baptized. Because it was the feast day of St. Martin of Tours, these new parents, Hans and Margarethe Luther, named their firstborn child Martin – Martin Luther.

As they held this baby boy in their arms, little did Hans and Margarethe realize the tremendous impact he would have, not only on the history of Germany, but also on the history of the whole world. Little did they know the role their son would play in restoring to the Church of his day the truth of God's Word and retaining that true for believers still today. Little did they realize that more than five hundred years later, all over the world, men, women, and children would be assembling in special worship services such as this one to say, “Thank you God, for the birth, life, and work of Dr. Martin Luther and for the Reformation of the Church.”

On October 31, 1517, an Augustinian monk named Martin Luther nailed a paper to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany. This in itself was not unusual. In those days, the church door served as the town's bulletin board. If someone wanted to debate an issue publicly, he would make it known by nailing a note on the church door. But the particular notice written by Luther was quite unusual compared to the commonly

accepted beliefs and practices of that time. That paper began the Reformation, a worldwide revolution that continues to have repercussions today.

Luther was a learned monk of both the Old and New Testaments. When he read the words of our text today, *“Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law...”*, Luther knew who it was referring to. It referred to him. It referred to those in Germany. It referred to all people. Before God the judge, all mankind stands guilty of sin and liable for punishment because of their many transgressions. Luther knew this and this became a foundation to his theology.

Throughout his days in the monastery, Luther saw more and more of his shortcomings. He tried to pray harder, spend more time of the day reading Scripture, because by doing this, he would be a better Christian. The law demanded deeds – holy thoughts, attitudes and works – to fulfill it.

Reading the words of our text for today, Luther saw how off the mark he really was: *“For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.”* Far from earning God’s declaration of righteousness, the law only produced a clear knowledge in man of how far he had missed the mark of the holiness God really demanded.

The Roman Catholic Church was very skewed in their interpretation of Scripture. They believed in the practice of grace AND good works for salvation. Luther scoured all throughout Scripture and could not find what the Roman Catholic Church was teaching. Luther read passages such as Ephesians 2:8-9 which read, *“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”* Those passages don’t support the doctrine which

Rome is teaching. Luther could only do one thing: hold fast to Scripture and not the teaching of man.

Luther saw beyond the smoke and mirrors of the Pope and the Roman Catholic Church. God declares a sinner not guilty of sin. Free of sin, guilt and punishment, the acquitted can enter the joys of heaven. This is the result of Christ and Christ alone. It is not the result of good works which we do. If salvation depended on good works, when would enough be good enough? Would one good work a day be sufficient? Would one good work an hour be enough? Would we have to do a good work every minute of every day, in hopes that we would be saved? Luther could not accept that. He repeatedly went back to Scripture and the answer was singular, not plural. The answer was Christ. Paul makes that abundantly clear in our text that *“righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.”*

The avenue by which God’s declaration, “not guilty of sin,” becomes ours is faith in Jesus Christ, not by trusting in our observance of the law or our good works to earn heaven. That is why Martin Luther wrote the 95 Theses. That is why Luther wrote pamphlet after pamphlet. The more that the Roman Catholic Church said that **we** had to do something to receive salvation, the more adamant Luther was in his writings against the Church.

Many people, in their sinful rebellion against God, continue to cling foolishly to the hope that their character, their life, their morality, and their good works have some worth or value that might enable them to gain heaven. People today continue to cling to the hope that their good works will outweigh their evil works, that their goodness is

superior to their sinfulness, or that even though we fail miserably, God might in the end reward us at least for our efforts, if not for our accomplishments.

There is absolutely nothing that any of us can do to gain heaven. Salvation is entirely a gift of God. A gift is something freely given, which the giver expects no payment. The Roman Catholic Church wanted to put a price tag on salvation, namely the indulgence. The indulgence, as Webster's Dictionary puts it, is a "remission of part or all of the temporal and especially purgatorial punishment that according to Roman Catholicism is due for sins whose eternal punishment has been remitted and whose guilt has been pardoned." That indulgence would spare you some time in purgatory and get you one step closer to salvation, which had already been given to you; however, you need to work at getting it.

When one hears that, how can they accept that? How could you accept that God sent His very Son to take on human form, to live a sinless life, to die for your sinful life so that you may receive forgiveness of sins, life and salvation, **BUT**, in order to receive forgiveness of sins, life and salvation, **YOU** have to do something to earn it! That is not a gift! That is something which you yourself earn.

Salvation, **by grace alone**, through faith **in Jesus Christ alone**, as found in **Scripture alone**, is the basis of our daily Christian life.

May we be as bold as Martin Luther: *"Unless I am convinced by the teachings of Holy Scripture or by sound reasoning – for I do not believe either the pope or councils alone, since they have often made mistakes and have even said the exact opposite about the same point – I am tied by the Scriptures I have quoted and by my conscience. I*

cannot and will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither safe nor right. Here I stand. God help me! Amen.”

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, amen.