

Reformation Day

“Justified freely by God’s grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus!”

(Romans 3:21-26)

October 29, 2023

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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, our text for this festival of the Reformation is from our Epistle Reading – Romans 3:21-26

**“21 But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, 22 even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25 whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, 26 to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.**

So far the text...

Maybe you heard on the news this week that the House of Representatives has elected a new Speaker of the House. His name is Mike Johnson from Louisiana. What are his beliefs and views? People are anxious to know, being third in line of succession to the presidency. Here was his reply.

*“I am a Bible-believing Christian,” Johnson said. “Someone asked me today in the media, they said, ‘It’s curious, people are curious: What does Mike Johnson think about any issue under the sun?’ I said, ‘Well, go pick up a Bible off your shelf and read it. That’s my worldview.’”*

The lens through which this leader of the people sees the world is the Bible. That’s a real good thing. And as Christians gathered here this Reformation Day morning, isn’t that our response also? Wasn’t that Martin Luther’s response. “Here I stand, I

can do no other”)? He dared not go against his conscience which was captive to the Word of God and recant his writings at the Diet of Worms.

Luther wanted to please God, and he struggled mightily with the fact that he believed he would never be able to achieve righteousness through his daily strivings. He wanted to be set free from his sin. But God revealed the Good News of salvation through the redemptive work of His Son, Jesus, to Martin Luther. Luther found hope in Romans 1:16-17.

**“16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “The just shall live by faith.”**

It all starts with God’s gracious disposition to His fallen creation – that He would send His Son, Jesus, to sacrifice Himself for the sins of the world. The Gospel is God’s power to salvation in Jesus, not ours. It’s 100 percent His work on the cross that saves us, not our work. It’s God’s righteousness graciously given to all who believe this, not our rags of unrighteousness. God declares a sinner just and righteous through faith in the redemptive work of Jesus. That’s God’s world view. That’s the Bible in a nutshell.

Thanks be to God that He has revealed this to all people! So our epistle reading begins two chapters later in Romans.

**“21 But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, 22 even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe.**

What God has revealed through the Law and the Prophets, God’s view of the world, how He sees His creation now corrupted by sin, how He has rescued His creation, was the view that Martin Luther saw in 1517. He saw that there is a righteousness outside of us – God’s righteousness. And this righteousness is graciously and freely given through faith in Jesus – to all and on all who believe.

This is best news ever that Luther discovered from God’s Word! Luther had to tell others! Bam, Bam, Bam - He hammered 95 theses on the church door which decried the practice of his day of buying indulgences to get into heaven. The true

treasure of the church is not temporal money, but the Gospel! Freedom from sin through the merits of Jesus! Freedom is not gained through the law, not our works, not money, not one's Jewish ancestry as Jesus said in John 8 of today's Gospel reading, but through the redemptive work of Jesus!

We give thanks to God for the Reformation that God's world view was re-revealed and is now crystal clear with regards to sin and salvation. The readings of the day reveal what God's truth is and what God's truth does for you and all people. Above all it's about freedom of the soul. God's truth in Jesus the Savior sets us free as we heard from our Gospel in John 8.

**“Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. 35 And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. 36 Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.”**

Being captive is a horrible thing. Over 200 people have been held hostage in the Gaza strip by Hamas since October 7. A few have been released. Will the others find freedom and return to their families? So, we pray.

Jesus speaks of a captivity, a slavery that is even more serious. For it is an eternal captivity of the soul because of sin. Who is Jesus speaking about? He speaking about anyone who commits sin is a slave of sin. This is God's world view – the Bible's view, of His creation. We are born into this captivity of original sin. As our text clearly says:

**“For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”**

In the verses preceding our text St. Paul clearly states this truth.

**“For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin.10 As it is written: “There is none righteous, no, not one; 11 There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God.”**

We are all the same – guilty before God. As Paul continues,

**“19 Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. 20 Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.”**

That's God's world view, the Bible's world view of sinful humanity. But thanks be to God, that His world view is moved by His goodness, and love for fallen humanity. None of us deserved this. On the contrary, we deserved eternal punishment for our sins. But, by grace alone, God forgave our sins through the shed blood of Jesus on the mercy seat of the cross.

**“24 being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25 whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith”**

Who is justified freely? All people! The receipt for Jesus' payment is given to the world at His resurrection. It's true! Paid in full. The Son has set you free! God wants all people to know this!

How does God give this great gift to a sinner? Through faith. When the Gospel is proclaimed and believed then God demonstrates His righteousness, that He is **“just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”**

God had to punish sin. He is just. So, out of love for us, He punished His only begotten Son, Jesus. And that makes God free to justify everyone who has faith in Jesus. What does the word “justify” mean? “Just as if I'd never sinned” because God proclaims you just and righteous in Jesus.

That's God's world view. Grace alone, through Christ alone, through faith alone, revealed in Scripture alone. These are the Solas of the Reformation that continue to comfort us and continue to set free captives from the tyranny of sin.

What a joy it is to remember one's baptism and see God's world view that I have been set free and washed of all my sin through faith in Jesus. What a joy to receive the very body and blood of Jesus this day in the Sacrament of the Altar and see God's world view that He forgives my sin through faith in these words, “Given and shed for you”. Luther's world view, the Reformation world view. The truth that sets us free in Jesus! Amen.

**“The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Amen. (Philippians 4:7)**