

Sermon for Reformation Sunday

Date: October 28, 2018

Location: St. John's Lutheran Church, Austin, MN

First Reading: Revelation 14:6–7

Epistle Reading: Romans 3:19–28

Gospel Reading: John 8:31–36

Sermon Text: Romans 3:19-28

Sermon Title: Our Lutheran Heritage


Sola Gratia
GRACE ALONE


Sola Fide
FAITH ALONE


Sola Scriptura
SCRIPTURE ALONE

Hymns:

LSB 506 – Glory Be To God the Father

LSB 645 – Built on the Rock the Church Shall Stand (v.1,4,5)

LSB 582 – God's Word Is Our Great Heritage

LSB 657 – A Mighty Fortress Is Our God

Liturgy:

Divine Service: Special



Pastor James Groleau
St. John's Lutheran Church
1200 13th Avenue NW
Austin, MN 55912
Office: (507) 433-2642
Shepherd@JamesPlace.net
StJohnsAustinLCMS.org
FaceBook.com/StJohnsAustin
Twitter.com@StJohnsAustinMN
FaceBook.com/Shepherd.James.Groleau



Text: Romans 3:19–28

We know that whatever the Law say applies to everyone under its influence, and no one can say a thing. The whole world is brought under the judgment of God. No one can have God's approval by any effort to follow the Law. The Law show what sin is.

Now, the way to receive God's approval has been made plain in a way other than the Law. Moses' Teachings and the Prophets tell us this. Everyone who believes has God's approval through faith in Jesus Christ.

There is no difference between people. Because everyone has sinned, and have fallen short of God's glory. They receive God's approval freely by an act of his kindness, through the price Christ Jesus paid to set us free from sin. God showed that Christ is the Mercy Seat where God's approval is given through faith in Christ's blood. In his patience God waited to deal with sins committed in the past. He waited so that he could display his approval at the present time. This shows that he is a God of justice, a God who approves of people who believe in Jesus.

So, do we have anything to brag about? Bragging has been eliminated. On what basis was it eliminated? On the basis of our own efforts? No, indeed! Rather, it is eliminated on the basis of faith. We hold that a person has God's approval by faith, not by his own efforts.

Did you know...

The swan is a popular symbol used to represent Martin Luther and is frequently found in Lutheran art. The history behind the references to Luther as a swan is quite interesting. Here is a brief summary:

John Huss (1370-1415), whose name "Huss" literally means "Goose" in the Bohemian language, was an important religious figure whose teachings strongly influenced Martin Luther and the Reformation. John Huss was excommunicated and burned at the stake on July 6, 1415. So what does this have to do with Luther and a swan? The following is recorded by a priest observing the execution of Huss. Just prior to being burned at the stake. Huss was asked to recant his teachings. In response he said, "You are now going to burn a goose but in one hundred years you will have a swan which you can neither roast nor boil." About 100 years later, on October 31, 1517 Martin Luther posted his 95 Theses on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg.



Now you know the rest of the story...

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Grace, peace and mercy be your in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Today is one of the most important days in the Lutheran Church. I would suggest to you it is in fact one of the most important days in the history of mankind. You might think, “Now pastor your just going a bit too far.” I don't think so.

Let me help you see why this day is so important. To do that I need to take you back to another day July 4th, 1776. It was on this day that our nation, the United States of America, was born. It was born out of a war that is know around the world as The Revolution. Beginning with the end of that war our nation started on a path that has led it to where we are today, living in the greatest and most powerful nation the world has ever known. We as American people live in more luxury and wealth than any other society that has ever existed. Having personally traveled to many countries I can attest to that fact. No one lives like we do.



Now you might be thinking, “Pastor, that's a very nice patriotic thing to say but what does that have to do with this day in the Church Year?” The answer to that question lies in another question: What caused The Revolution? The American Revolution came about after many, many, people came from Europe to the New World. Many people left the Old World for reasons of religious freedom.

I know you have heard all those tales about how all of the founding fathers were deists and they were all just out for money and power. Some were, but the history revisionists have their pretty words and I have the documents these people actually wrote. I have documents like:

- ◆ The Mayflower Compact.
- ◆ The writings the many Founding Fathers like George Washington who wrote out many of his prayers.
- ◆ The writings and work of Benjamin Rush who founded the national Sunday School program, and the public school system.
- ◆ The congressional record called the “Annals of Congress” where it records one of the first acts of congress was to have Bibles printed for required use in all public schools to teach reading, ethics and morality.

The list goes on and on. The people came to the New World to escape religious persecution.

If it were not for the Reformation of the Church, ignited by Martin Luther, the religious persecution would never have existed as it did, and ultimately the American Revolution would never have occurred. It is in fact the Reformation that was the first sprout of growth that caused this great nation to exist. That is our heritage as Lutherans. That is our pride and our contribution to the world.

That heritage is founded on the teachings of Reformation beginning with the slogan of the Lutheran Church. In Latin it is: Sola Gratia {GRAT-see-ya}, Sola Fide {FEE-day}, Sola Scriptura {scrip-TOUR-ah}.

Sola Gratia means “Alone Grace” or by grace alone. It is by God's good grace alone that we are saved. Paul wrote in his letter to the Ephesians (chapter 2):

God saved you through faith as an act of kindness. You had nothing to do with it. Being saved is a gift from God. It is not the result of anything you've done, so no one can brag about it.¹

It is not we who save ourselves but God who came down to us to do all things needed for our salvation. It is that same grace that continues to preserve us and keep us in that faith until we ultimately know first-hand the promises God has made to us and the wonder of their fulfillment in our own eternal lives when we see God face to face.

Sola Fide means: "Alone Faith" or by faith alone. It is through the faith God works in our hearts by His grace that we are saved. Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans in chapter 3:

So, do we have anything to brag about? Bragging has been eliminated. On what basis was it eliminated? On the basis of our own efforts? No, indeed! Rather, it is eliminated on the basis of faith. We conclude that a person has God's approval by faith, not by his own efforts.²

Again it has nothing to do with us trying to get right with God. We cannot get right with God. God had to come to make us right with Him, to justify us. It is interesting to note that in the language of the New Testament, in Greek, the word for 'righteous' and 'justify' are the same word. In Greek to be justified mean to be righteous-ified, or to be made right. When we say we are justified by faith it means we are made right, or righteous, by faith. It is that very same faith that you receive, by the power of the Holy Spirit in Holy Baptism, that God works in you to make you right. To make you justified in His sight.

Finally Sola Scriptura means: "Alone Scripture" or Scripture alone. God's grace and the faith He works in our hearts comes to us through His Word, through Scripture. Listen to what the great prophet Isaiah says in chapter 55:

Rain and snow come down from the sky. They do not go back again until they water the earth. They make it sprout and grow so that it produces seed for farmers and food for people to eat. My word, which comes from my mouth, is like the rain and snow. It will not come back to me without results. It will accomplish whatever I want and achieve whatever I send it to do.³

Where God's Word is spoken there His power is made known. It is through His Word that He does His work. When God said, "Let there be light." What happened? There was light. Why? Because God said so. When God says that you are forgiven and made right with Him what happens? You are forgiven and made right with Him. Why? Because God said so. God Works through His Word.

That is why we are commanded to bring God's Word to all people. Jesus Himself gave us this command. Matthew records it in chapter 28:

1 Ephesians 2:8-9
2 Romans 3:27-28
3 Isaiah 55:10-11

Wherever you go, make disciples of all nations: Baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Teach them to do everything I have commanded you, and remember that I am always with you until the end of time.⁴

How is He with us? Listen to how John the disciple described Jesus in the first chapter of His Gospel.

In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was already with God in the beginning. Everything came into existence through him. Not one thing that exists was made without him. He was the source of life, and that life was the light for humanity. The light shines in the dark, and the dark has never extinguished it.⁵

Jesus is described by John as “The Word.” That same Word that Jesus Himself commanded us to share with all people. The Word found in the Old and New Testaments of the Bible. The Word which God has used to reveal Himself to us. The Word we refer to as Holy Scripture. It is by that Scripture alone that Faith alone is worked in our hearts, and that is done by God's Grace alone.

This is the reason the slogan of the Reformation became Sola Gratia, Sola Fide, Sola Scriptura. Grace Alone. Faith Alone. Scripture Alone. This is the unique singularity of Christianity. It is only in the true Christian faith that God comes to us to make all things right. In all other religions, faiths, and beliefs it is we who must get to god. It is we who must make ourselves right with god. Only in Christianity is it the one, true, holy, living God who does all the work.

Look at Jesus' words in Matthew chapter 6:

“When you pray, don't be like hypocrites. They like to stand in synagogues and on street corners to pray so that everyone can see them. I can guarantee this truth: That will be their only reward. When you pray, go to your room and close the door. Pray privately to your Father who is with you. Your Father sees what you do in private. He will reward you.⁶

You see you don't have to make a great show or achieve great feats to get God's attention. You already have God's attention. It is you – hear this now – it is *you*, for whom God created all that is. You are the pinnacle of His creation. You are the reason for everything that is. He made it all for you. That is the depth and breadth of His love for you. Every prayer of the faithful is heard. Every need is known. Every desire is understood. Nothing escapes the wisdom and knowledge of God.

4 Matthew 28:19-20

5 John 1:1-5

6 Matthew 6:5-6

This, children of God, is the message Martin Luther brought to the world. It was this return to the truths of Scripture that caused so much conflict in the Old World. It was this conflict that caused so many to leave their homes to come to the New World, to the Americas. A place promising freedom to practice their Christian faith free of influence by the government.



Martin Luther

It was in fact the Reformation of the Church, the event we celebrate today, that brought about not only this great land in which we live, but from this land a new and unprecedented hunger to bring the truths and promises of God's Word to all people.

Before this country existed mission work was fairly limited. It was this nation's prosperity, and its Christian foundations that paved the way to bring God's Word to so many lost people throughout the whole world.

This is the great pride of our church. This is the reason we can stand tall, and boldly proclaim, "We are Lutherans!"

In Jesus' name.

Amen.

