

“The Reformation is All for Nothing!”

To speak of the Reformation is to speak of the blessed Dr. Martin Luther – but the Reformation isn’t about Luther. The Reformation is about the one, holy, Christian and apostolic Church – about the Gospel, which is always about Jesus Christ and His righteousness. If you get that wrong, then – “The Reformation is All for Nothing.”

The Word of God is a healing balm and a lamp unto our feet – but it is also a hammer that crushes you to dust. Luther knew all about the crushing blows of God’s Law – as he spent his early years in life dodging that hammer by trying to be “good enough” for God. It didn’t work ... it never does.

No matter how hard you try – no matter how much you dress yourself up as a “good enough Christian” – God still knows exactly who you are under those filthy rags that you think are so lovely. That’s the problem Luther kept running into --- “Good” was never “good enough.”

The hammer keeps falling. “None is righteous, no, not one,” God says, “All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one ...For by works of the law no human being will be justified in His sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.” (Rom. 3:10, 12, 20)

Trying to observe the Law will never make anyone “good enough” for God – because that’s not what God is doing through His Law. His Law crushes us – it shows us the full blown, hellish horror of our sins --- so that our pride-filled mouths might be glued shut before God.

You know the pride I’m talking about. It’s the pride that says: “Lord, have you been taking note of all the good I’ve done for others – the example I set for my family – how devoted I am to my church?”

Those words may sound good in our own ears but they shriek horribly in God's ears. He didn't want to hear the boasting of the Jews in the Gospel reading for today – He doesn't want to hear the boasting from your lips – and He certainly doesn't want to hear it at your funeral!

You've been to funerals like that before – "Oh so-and-so was such a good person – Uncle so-and-so was such a fine, upstanding Christian" – and God wonders who in the world we're talking about.

"What good person?" "No one does good, not even one," He says. Why are you spraying your good works around like cheap perfume, thinking it will cover the stench of your sin? Any and every attempt to make yourself "good enough" – is All for Nothing.

That, dear friends, is the truth of the Reformation. It's not YOUR DOING that places you in a right relationship with God – it is HIS DOING.

Think about Adam and Eve before the Fall into sin – they didn't boast of how "good" they were – they didn't brag about their "right" relationship with God --- for it was God, who by grace, created them to live in a right relationship with Him. It was His doing, His gift. And since the Fall – only God in His grace – can restore that relationship. It's all His doing.

"All have sinned" – Adam and Eve, St. Paul, Martin Luther, you and me – "there is no distinction" – "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." But God does not leave you there – smothered by sin, death, and damnation. "All have sinned" – but the good news is that you "are justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."

That's the Gospel! It's God doing the doing, and giving you the blessed results. It's God bending down to pour forgiveness into your ears. Did you hear what He says? "If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."

It is God bending His big, holy back and getting down on His knees to bath you with life-giving water. It is God, who sent His Son to do the suffering and the dying and the serving – opening your mouth to give you His medicine of immortality – His assurance of the resurrection of your own body and the life everlasting.

The Reformation brought to light again that man's righteousness does not come from himself – but from God. Jesus, who hung from the cross to bleed and die for you – He is your Savior from sin, death, and everything that hell can throw at you. Jesus is your righteousness – a righteousness from God, apart from your works. It is a righteousness that is given, by grace – and received, by faith, in Jesus Christ alone.

So don't bother collecting all your righteous acts and polishing them up for God – because if you're going to go that route, you might as well become a monk as Luther once did – looking for a few more rules to obey in order to be “good enough.” Instead, look where the Great Reformer was finally forced to look – outside himself – to the Christ, who alone is “good enough.”

Quit digging in the trash heap of your heart for a nugget of holiness – quit trusting the works of your hands – and listening to that sin-twisted reason of yours. Look instead to the man born of the Virgin Mary – to the One who has borne all your sins – and in whose wounds your sins are lost, buried, gone ...

And do not boast in YOUR faith – in the fact that you believe in Jesus Christ. Faith doesn't chase down and tackle the Giver in order to get the gift – it only receives what is given. Faith is more like a blind beggar into whose rusty old cup God the Holy Spirit freely tosses the treasures of heaven, wrapped up in Jesus Christ.

Faith says: “You have given me Christ and all His blessings. You have poured into my cup – forgiveness, not condemnation – mercy, not wrath – life, not death – joy, not judgment – heaven, not hell. You have given me a permanent place in Your holy family – not as slave, but free – a son. You have given me ... ALL for NOTHING.”

Thank You Lord for doing the doing, and giving the Gift. “Amen.”

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.