

October 29, 2017  
Sermon for Reformation Sunday (500<sup>th</sup>)  
St Peter Lutheran Church  
Bowie, TX  
Larry Knobloch, Pastor  
Romans 3:19–28

*J.J.- Jesu Juva—Help me, Jesus*

Romans 3:19–28 (ESV)

<sup>19</sup> Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. <sup>20</sup> For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. <sup>21</sup> But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— <sup>22</sup> the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, <sup>25</sup> whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. <sup>26</sup> It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. <sup>27</sup> Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. <sup>28</sup> For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior,  
Jesus Christ!

Amen.

500 years ago, October 31, 1517, a young Roman Catholic Priest by the name of Martin Luther posted on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany, a list of 95 theses, or statements, and requested a meeting of the church leaders to discuss and debate the topic of these 95 theses.

At the time, Martin Luther had no idea what drastic changes this simple act would bring upon the church, but posting those 95 theses began a chain reaction that resulted in the events that we know today as the Protestant Reformation

Lutherans celebrate and observe this last Sunday in October as Reformation Sunday, the birthday of the Lutheran Church.

Who was Dr. Martin Luther?

Several years ago, the Arts and Entertainment Network listed what they considered to be the most influential people of the past millennium. They are:

1. Gutenberg, for his invention of the movable-type printing press that made books readily available and affordable for the first time.
2. Isaac Newton, for his work in science, physics, and astronomy.
3. Martin Luther, who brought religion and education to the common people, and is, to some degree, credited for laying the foundation of democracy.

So, Martin Luther is a significant personality in our history, but who is he?

What happened on that day 500 years ago, when Luther posted the 95 theses, was simply the end of a long, personal struggle that had been brewing within Luther's soul and spirit for several years.

Martin Luther grew up in a day and age when the church pictured God as an angry, vindictive God, a God of wrath and punishment who watched over us, anxiously waiting for us to make a mistake so he could then punish us with eternal suffering in hell.

The church taught people to fear God in the worst sense of the word.

Then the church used that fear to control the people, to get them to submit to the church and obey all the teachings and rules of the church, including the manmade traditions and teachings.

The church used that fear to accumulate tremendous wealth and power for the Pope in Rome and for the Roman Catholic Church, which was the only legal church in Europe at the time. If you wanted to be forgiven, you had to complete this or that task and/or pay this much money. Yes, Jesus paid for your sins, but you still have to do your part.

As a young man, Luther decided that he didn't want to spend all of eternity in hell and suffering, so he set out to make himself right and pleasing before God:

- He left a promising future in law school.
- He took on the disciplines of becoming an Augustinian monk.
  - He continued his schooling and was ordained as a priest in the Church.
- Later, he earned his Ph.D. in Bible and Theology.
  - And eventually he became a professor at the University of Wittenberg in Germany, one of the new and upcoming schools of the Church.

But through all of this, Luther didn't find what he wanted the most, what he longed for and searched for.

He wanted peace with God and rest for his troubled spirit.

And he couldn't escape this one fact. No matter how hard he tried to be good and obey the commands of God and the Church, no matter how hard he worked to do everything that a Christian was supposed to do, he was still a sinner.

And, since he was taught that God punishes sinners, he could only see himself as condemned before God. He reasoned, "God is holy and just. I am a poor, miserable sinner, no matter how hard I try. How can a holy God possibly love a sinner like me?"

In spite of doing everything the Church said a person should do to win the mercy, love, and forgiveness of God, Luther found no peace for his soul.

In a way, Luther was simply more honest with himself than most of us are today. We tend to minimize our sins, as if they make no difference to God, as if God doesn't care. Luther, on the other hand, saw his sin for what it really was – the thing which separated him from God.

However, throughout all of this personal struggle, Luther was not a basket case. On the contrary, he was developing quite a reputation for himself as being one of the budding stars of the Church; an extremely intelligent and gifted person, a great scholar and professor at the university. He was highly regarded and respected.

One day as Luther was preparing for a series of lectures on Paul's letter to the Romans, he was reading and studying chapter 3, a portion of Scripture he was well acquainted with. But this time as he read it, his eyes were opened.

In Luther's words, "It was as though the gates of heaven were opened to me!"

*But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known... This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe ... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law (Ro 3:21-28).*

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus said, "*You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free!*" (Jn 8:32). Suddenly, Luther knew the truth of the Gospel, and just as suddenly Luther was set free!

He was set free from trying to make himself worthy and acceptable before God, something he could never achieve for himself, no matter how hard he tried.

He was free to simply rest in the grace, favor, and love of God.

He was free to experience the grace and forgiveness freely given to us because of what Jesus Christ accomplished for us on the cross of Calvary.

Luther experienced the Gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ!

It had been there right in front of his eyes all along, but it had been hidden, obscured, covered by centuries of bad teaching and church tradition.

And the truth of that Gospel is that we are not saved, we are not put right with God by being good, or obeying the law, or going through all the outward rituals of religion, or anything else we may try to do to make ourselves worthy before God.

We are saved solely by the love and grace of God; freely and generously given to us through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Salvation comes to us as a free gift of God's grace.

All we have to do is respond to it. All we have to do is accept that gift in faith. Faith is simply saying, "Yes, Lord, I believe. Yes, Lord, I accept your gift of love, forgiveness, and acceptance. Thank you, Lord, for loving and forgiving me."

Luther was eager to share this new-found discovery of the Gospel with the world.

He thought that he would find a ready audience, but instead he was met with resistance and persecution.

The hierarchy of the Church could see that if Luther were left alone to spread his teachings, they could end up losing their power and control over the people, along with great a great deal of wealth. And that was really the point/ If we preach the truth, we lose our power, prestige and our wealth!

And so the church leaders branded Luther as a heretic, an outlaw, and tried everything they possible could to suppress his teaching. They even issued a death warrant on Luther.

But the church wasn't able to stop Martin Luther. He was the right man for the right time, empowered by the Holy Spirit, and armed with the truth of the Gospel.

There is no greater power on earth than that. Luther's proclamation of the Gospel resulted in the Protestant Reformation and the beginning of the Lutheran Church.

Sad to say, there are still many Christians, including many Lutherans, who continue to struggle and wrestle with the same doubts and questions as did Luther so many years ago.

What was lacking, what was missing in Luther's life, and what he discovered in the Scriptures, is the assurance of salvation, the certainty of the love and grace of God through Jesus Christ, the pure joy and thrill that comes in knowing, "I am a saved. I am loved. I am a redeemed child of God!"

Luther discovered the true and fundamental nature of God's grace: *God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him (Jn 3:16-17).*

It doesn't get any clearer than that?

Yet today there are many Christians in all kinds of Christian churches who believe that Jesus is the Son of God and that God raised Him from the dead, but still continue to doubt, to wonder if they really are saved.

These misguided souls believe that their salvation still depends on how good they are and how closely they obey the law and live by all the rules.

Please understand that I'm not saying that God doesn't care how we live.

God sincerely desires that we stay close to Him and that we live lives of honesty, integrity, and obedience to His will. But how we live doesn't save us.

Jesus Christ saves us. Christ Alone!

That's the Gospel. That's the Good News that sets us free.

We are saved by the grace of God through faith and trust in Jesus Christ.

If you get nothing else from this sermon this morning, I hope you get this.

It's nice to know something about Martin Luther and the history of the Reformation. But Dr. Luther never wanted a church that was about him; he might even be appalled if he knew that there was a denomination named after him.

But it is far more important that when you leave church this morning, you will leave with the knowledge and assurance that God loves you, that by the grace of God through Jesus Christ you are forgiven. You have been made a child of God in baptism by the power of the Holy Spirit and you can leave here, today and always, truly knowing the joy of your salvation.

As Martin Luther read the Scriptures, he discovered the Gospel, and, as he put it, the "gates of heaven" opened to him.

As children of the Reformation, I pray that you know the assurance of God's love and grace, and believe that heaven has been opened for you, too.

Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Amen.

S.D.G.—Soli Deo Gloria

## **Sermon Outline**

### ***Who was Dr. Martin Luther?***

*Romans 3:19-28*

- I. He wanted peace with God and rest for his troubled spirit.
- II. Luther learned the truth of the Gospel, and the truth set him free!
- III. Salvation comes to us as a free gift of God's grace.