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SOLI DEO GLORIA  
Psalm 31:4  
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**Psalm 31:4 'The Commemoration of the Death of Martin Luther'**

This year marks the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation of the Church. This morning is the second of four special commemoration services marking significant events which took place during the Reformation era. Last November we remembered the birth of Martin Luther, the father of the Reformation. This morning we commemorate his death.

Martin Luther died on February 18, 1546 at about 3:00am in the morning. He was 63 years old. He was not at home with his wife and family, but at a conference in the town of Eisleben, Germany, doing the work of the church. He had traveled there with a close friend and fellow theologian; Dr. Justus Jonas. Luther had been battling intense intestinal pain for a prolonged period of time. While still in Eisleben he recognized that death was near for after the conference he told Justus that he was unable to travel. Luther accepted that his final hours on this earth had arrived. His close friend, Justus, stayed with Luther during his final days. Justus sat with Luther through that final night and recorded what took place. His report is a touching witness to the faith of the man who reformed the church and changed the course of history.

Three specific moments in the hours preceding Luther's death stand as a witness to his confident faith in Jesus as his Lord and Savior. There was found in Luther's pocket a piece of paper on which he had written. "*This is true. We are beggars all.*" Luther often used the term 'beggar' to describe how a sinner stands before God. We are beggars all; each and every one of us. We stand before God with

our hand extended asking God to give us gifts for which we cannot pay and blessings which we do not deserve. And Almighty God, upon seeing our deep spiritual poverty and pitiful need extends the hand of His bountiful goodness and limitless charity, to give us freely of His grace and forgiveness. The heart and core of all for which Luther fought, confessed, taught and suffered was that God's grace is a free gift which is not deserved and cannot be earned. God's forgiveness and salvation is a free gift received solely by humble faith. This is the meaning of the note that Luther carried in his pocket, "*This is true, we are beggars all.*" Luther was a famous and accomplished man. But for all his notoriety Luther recognized and accepted that he was a poor sinner who begged for the crumbs that fell from his master's table. Certainly we know that Luther was a man of brash defiance and bold words. Such vigor was required to defend God's truth. But in his heart he saw himself much differently. Luther did not put his hope in his fame, nor in his vast theological writings, nor in the accolades he received as a preacher and teacher. His hope was only and solely in Jesus Christ and His blood shed upon the cross. Luther's observation that we are beggars is real for all of us. We are beggars all, kneeling at the foot of the cross, seeking mercy and grace from Christ who died for us that we might be covered in His cleansing blood.

Justus Jonas recorded a second significant incident in Luther's death as he sat with Luther through that night. At one point in the night, Luther woke up in great pain. Luther knew he was close to death and he recited passages from God's Word that reviewed the free gift of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. He quoted passages from Romans that affirmed that his salvation was not based on his good works, neither on any kind of penance, nor on the number and

length of prayers he had spoken, or on indulgences purchased or on Masses that were bought. Luther was convinced from the testimony of Holy Scriptures that he was saved by God's grace alone through faith alone in Jesus. He recited passages such as Ephesians 2:10, ***"We are saved by God's grace through faith and not by works."*** And ***"This is the work of God, that you believe in Him who He has sent."*** Each passage recited affirmed the most important central truth of the Christian faith; that we are poor sinners who are saved by God's grace alone through faith alone in Jesus.

The third witness to Luther's faith is found in a Psalm verse that Luther repeated during the hours of that night. As pain and distress wracked his body Luther recited Psalm 31:5, ***"Into Your hands I commit my spirit. You have redeemed me, O faithful God."*** Four times through that night Luther returned to this Psalm. ***"Into Your hands I commit my spirit. You have redeemed me, O faithful God."*** ***"Into Your hands I commit my spirit. You have redeemed me, O faithful God."*** ***"Into Your hands I commit my spirit. You have redeemed me, O faithful God."*** After Luther called out to God with the words of this Psalm, Justus Jonas asked Luther if he was ready to die trusting in Jesus Christ as His Lord. It is hard for us today to fully appreciate the immensity of this question put to Luther. Luther was once a faithful monk who had pledged his life to the service of the church and uphold its doctrines and practices. He had once sought to earn God's favor with fasting and prayers and good works and acts of penance as his Augustinian order taught him to do. After discovering the Biblical truth that salvation was a free gift of God's grace alone received by faith alone the church he loved and served excommunicated him. The Reformation Luther started by nailing those ninety-five thesis to the church door of Wittenberg

had taken place only 29 years before his death. During those 29 years nations divided along protestant/Catholic lines. Thousands of protestant churches were established throughout the continent. A bitter war had erupted over the scope of the authority of the church. The lives of millions of Christians had been affected by Luther's singular stand. Here on his death bed lay a man who had started a Reformation whose principles would drive the quest for religious freedom in the colonization of America in the decades still to come. Justus Jonas asked this famous man if he could, in good conscience, be confident of the doctrine that he confessed in Christ. Luther was very ill, but his answer was crystal clear. He said, "Ja." That's it, "Ja." German for "Yes." This poor beggar put his trust, life, judgement and eternal soul in the arms of Jesus who died for his sin upon the cross. For all his amazing achievements, Luther's faith was confident and unwavering expressed in that simple response, "'Ja...' 'I believe in Jesus.'" "Ja,' this is my faith."

Each one of us will one day face our last hour when we shall be called to stand before the judgment seat of God. And at that moment our wealth, our works, our accomplishments, and all the other earthly trivia of life will lose its importance. At that moment there is nothing left to say but 'Ja'. "Yes." I believe in Jesus Christ who has paid for my sin and rose from the dead.

We are God's people gathered around the Word and Sacraments of God. We gather to hear this Gospel that all who believe and are baptized confessing Jesus Christ as Lord shall be saved. It is true, we are beggars all, who can only pray, "***Into Your hands I commit my spirit. You have redeemed me, O faithful God.***" Jesus Christ is my Savior and my Lord. 'Ja'. This is most certainly true. Amen.