



ONE VOICE



Churches: ♦Bethany ♦Immanuel ♦Lunder ♦Silver Lake ♦Winnebago

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From the Pastor's Desk

"For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law. Romans 6:28



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alone

Martin Luther grew up in Germany during the Renaissance, a time of cultural change. There was more time, energy and investment in music and the arts and education and philosophy as a new middle class began to emerge. New Universities were springing up throughout Europe, including Germany. Luther attended the University of Erfurt, where he received his Master's Degree. Martin studied math, sciences, philosophy and law as he studied to be a lawyer. On the way back to Erfurt from a week visit to his parents, Luther encountered a thunderstorm that had come upon him quickly. Lightning was striking all round him. He prayed to St. Anne, the saint for travelers, to save him from the storm and he would become a monk. Surviving the storm, Luther kept his vow and when he reached Erfurt, he entered the local Augustinian monastery to become a monk.

Luther wrestled with the philosophies he had studied about humanity and the church's teaching about Jesus being a judge who knew every secret sin of the heart. Luther struggled to love a God, who knew his sin and Luther knew that he would never be able to justify himself before such a righteous God. Luther's mentor Johann Staupitz encouraged Luther to read scriptures and to go to Wittenberg to be a professor at the new University. So Luther studied the Psalms and discovered images of God who was caring and loving, like a shepherd of Psalm 23. Luther found other images in the scriptures of God being a loving God who cared about him. Then he had to prepare a series of lectures on Apostle Paul's letter to Rome and he read Romans 3:28, "*we are justified by faith apart from works of the law.*" Luther wrote on his Bible in big letters "Alone". We are justified, made right with God as a gift of grace through faith, alone.

Luther was so taken by this revelation of God's grace as opposed to what the church had been teaching about work's righteousness and Indulgences, pieces of paper the Pope signed guaranteeing forgiveness of sins for the cost of the Indulgences. The more Luther studied the scriptures, the more he discovered grace by our Lord Jesus, who was willing to bear the cross, the grave and be resurrected to defeat our sins. Convinced by scripture of God's grace in direct contrast to the Pope's selling of Indulgences, Luther thought it was time to debate the issue. On October 31, 1517 Luther posted 95 Theses, statements for discussion, on the door of the Wittenberg Church. Someone translated the Latin to German and made thousands of copies of the Theses and spread them around Germany. The people were inspired by Luther's discussion of God's grace found in the scriptures and Luther's criticism of the Pope's Indulgences. The Reformation began changing the Church and Western history.



This is our Lutheran Heritage of reform, lifting up scripture as the highest authority in areas of faith and life. We lift up the good news of the gospel, that we are saved by grace alone through faith alone. Luther lifted up the good news of Jesus, becoming fully human, yet fully God, who suffered, died and was raised to defeat sin, death and Satan. Jesus seeks to reconcile us with God, removing our sins. We are justified, made right with God, not because of anything we do or can do, but it is a free gift of grace. We can never earn God's grace. Nor could we ever buy it. God simply forgives us and claims us through his gift of grace of justification. It is a gift of love.

Just as Martin Luther was living through a cultural change, we are living through a cultural change. During Luther's time the culture was changing because of the Renaissance influences and the teaching of the church. The Church taught everyone is guilty of sin and under God's judgment and you better do enough good works or buy an Indulgence to be forgiven. Today, we are going through a cultural change as well. Instead of the culture being shaped by the Church about sin and needing to seek forgiveness, the culture has pushed the church to the side, with little influence.

Yet, as Lutherans we have this great heritage of good news of God's love. We have this heritage of proclaiming that God has claimed us with his love. We have this heritage that Jesus has justified, recreated us as if we never sinned, reconciling us to God as a free gift of grace. Hardly anyone is interested in hearing about this free gift of grace. There is more interest in the new I-phones, the latest games in the NFL, what the Kardashians are up to than hearing about this free gift of grace of justification. So what will we do with this great heritage?

We will celebrate the Reformation and Martin Luther on Reformation Sunday. We will sing Martin Luther's famous hymn, "A Mighty Fortress". We will continue to put Bibles, in the language of the people, in the hands of people. We will continue to worship in the language of the people. We will have Bible studies. We will have confirmation classes that use Luther's Small Catechism teaching the basics of God's love and grace. We will continue to lift up our role of Priesthood of all believers, as we serve God and our neighbors through our vocations. But this gift of God's grace that we celebrate, heritage of proclamation of this gift is too good, too great to keep to ourselves. We are called to share God's gift of grace and love to each other and to our neighbors. The world is still as broken if not more broken as in Luther's time. The need to be loved is great. The burden of guilt is still heavy. Let's celebrate our heritage of faith, by not only singing "A Mighty Fortress", but by sharing the good news that we are justified by grace through faith.

Pastor Randy



WANDERINGS AND WONDERINGS



Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us..." Ephesians 5:1-2



Apples...

A few years ago a group of salesmen went to a regional sales convention in Chicago ... They had assured their wives that they would be

home in plenty of time for Friday night's dinner. In their rush to catch the plane home and with tickets and briefcases, one of these salesmen inadvertently kicked over a table which held a display of apples. Apples flew everywhere. Without stopping or looking back, they all managed to reach the plane in time for their nearly-missed boarding.....

ALL BUT ONE!!!

He paused, took a deep breath, got in touch with his feelings and experienced a twinge of compassion for the girl whose apple stand had been overturned. He told his buddies to go on without him, waved good-bye, told one of them to call his wife when they arrived at their home destination and explain his taking a later flight.

Then he returned to the terminal where the apples were all over the terminal floor. He was glad he did. The 16-year-old girl was totally blind! She was softly crying, tears running down her cheeks in frustration, and at the same time helplessly groping for her spilled produce as the crowd swirled about her; no one stopping and no one to care for her plight.

The salesman knelt on the floor with her, gathered up the apples, put them back on the table and helped organize her display. As he did this, he noticed that many of them had become battered and bruised; these he set aside in another basket.

When he had finished, he pulled out his wallet and said to the girl, "Here, please take this \$50 for the damage we did. Are you okay?" She nodded through her tears.



He continued on with, "I hope we didn't spoil your day too badly." As the salesman started to walk away, the bewildered blind girl called out to him, "Mister..." He paused and turned to look back into those blind eyes. She continued, "Are you Jesus?"

He stopped in mid-stride and he wondered. He gently went back and said, "No, I am nothing like Jesus - He is good, kind, caring, loving, and would never have bumped into your display in the first place.

"The girl gently nodded: "I only asked because I prayed for Jesus to help me gather the apples. He sent you to help me, Thank you for hearing Jesus, Mister."

Then slowly he made his way to catch the later flight with that question burning and bouncing about in his soul: "Are you Jesus?"

Do people mistake you for Jesus? Shouldn't that be our goal? To be "little Christ's" ... "imitators of God" ... "chips off the old block as children of God".

That's our destiny, is it not? To be so much like Jesus that people cannot tell the difference as we live and interact with a world that is often blind to Jesus' love, life and grace.

If we claim to know Jesus, we should live, walk and act as Jesus would. Knowing Jesus is more than simply quoting scripture and going to church. It's actually living the Word as life unfolds day to day.

To play on the theme of "apples" - You are the apple of His eye even though you, too, have been bruised by a fall. He stopped what He was doing and picked up you and me on a hill called Calvary and paid in full for our damaged fruit.

*The nicest place to be is in someone's thoughts, the safest place to be is in someone's prayers and the very best place to be is
in the hands of God*

*Wanderings and Wonderings,
Pastor Bill Peters*



