

“HERE WE STAND.....500 YEARS LATER!”

Romans 3:19-24, 28

May the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, restore you, and make you strong, firm and steadfast. {1 Peter 5:10}

Celebrants of our Lutheran heritage:

“**Where were you when it happened?**” People tend to ask that question when there’s a significant event.

“Where were you” when Titanic sank in the N. Atlantic in 1912?

“Where were you” when Japanese forces bombed Pearl Harbor in 1941?

“Where were you” when JFK was assassinated in Dallas in 1963?

“Where were you” when the space shuttle **Challenger** exploded after takeoff in 1986 or **Columbia** disintegrated over Texas in 2003?

“Where were you” when hijacked passenger jets flew into the Twin Towers in NYC or the Pentagon in Washington in 2001?

“Where were you” when we celebrated our Centennial in 2002 or K2L was dedicated in 2007 or the Packers won their last Super Bowl in 2011?

“Where were you” when a 34 yr old Augustinian friar, preacher, university lecturer, & O.T. professor walked 8 minutes from his monastery home on one end of the town of Wittenberg to the Castle Church on the other end of town to post his 95 statements on the Castle door protesting the sale of indulgences as a way to buy forgiveness for sin as well as a fund raiser to build St. Peter’s Church in 1517? Of course, you weren’t there...or were you?

Lutherans have been waiting for this celebration for years. **Books & articles** have been written, **Bible studies** have been prepared, **music** has been composed, and **a movie** has been produced. When Martin Luther pounded those nails into the door of the Castle Church, he had no inkling of the firestorm he would start or the reputation he would earn. And he certainly had no idea of the storm he still brings 5 centuries later. Protestants claim Luther as their own one way or another, and Roman Catholics are still trying to figure out what to do with him 500 years later!

Well, I know what we’re going to do with him. We are celebrating not so much the man, as the message of this man. It’s the pure Gospel of Jesus Christ that is the absolutely **ONLY** {I repeat ONLY} way to heaven. So we turn to **SCRIPTURE ALONE** to find **GRACE ALONE** that is ours by **FAITH ALONE!** These are the 3 pillars of the Reformation upon which Lutherans have stood. And today, we gather with them and confess:

“HERE WE STAND.....500 YEARS LATER!”

1. Still unrighteous before God by our works
2. Still declared righteous before God by Christ’s work

1

I don’t what Luther’s I.Q. was, but it had to be off the charts. He was a genius, with a mind that grew in wisdom beyond belief. As a lawyer, he had a legal mind that was no match in the courts. But he was no match for the guilt he carried in his heart over his sin. It consumed him. It ate him up. He was like paper in a shredder – cut to pieces of trying to satisfy a God who was absolute furious, angry, and condemning. On top of that, he was raised in a theology that put the entire burden of trying to satisfy God on oneself. You do your works, your merits, you earn God’s favor by doing. And that’s all Luther knew. If you suck on a lemon long enough, it’s not sour anymore. That’s what his Roman church taught him from little on. Your works earn salvation, that’s it. Now get going!

But Luther never got used to the sour lemon. All the law ever did was make him more miserable than he was before. So he became a monk, entered the monastery, and tried to put the weight his guilt on his own shoulders. Priests were at altars 24-7, saying masses to achieve merit for the living and the dead hoping to get time reduced in purgatory. The term “**righteousness of God**” was a sour lemon because Luther saw a God who would condemn and judge those who didn’t have enough of their own righteousness. God’s righteousness must be something He demands from us, things we must do to earn his approval. The more Luther gazed into the requirements of the Law, the more loudly his conscience screamed: **I know my transgressions and my sin is always before me.** {Ps 51:3} The more he struggled to improve himself, the more he realized how much he failed and deserved God’s wrath. All he knew was **the soul that sins is the one who will die!** {Ez 18:20} So facing God’s judgment in death was Luther’s worst nightmare. To him, God was a monster!

500 years later – here we stand still unrighteous before God by our works. Paul’s words before us express the themes of true Christian theology about every one of us. No one here is exempt from what he says. **Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced [muzzled] and the whole world held accountable to God. Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather through the law we become conscious of sin.**

How can any of us claim God's favor? **How do we get right with God?** We may actually be led to believe that our lives are not all that bad, that comparing to that other guy – we come out better than 90% of them and so we have a higher approval rating with God. ? In 1 John 1:8: we read: **If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.** Do we think our rating is up today because we're in church, because we put in a special Reformation gift, because we're in the choirs & put in all that practice, because we're going to Madison, because I'm in the pulpit.

Paul says in our text: **There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.** We fall short of any favor, honor/glory from God. ME, YOU, the person you admire, the person you can't stand, the person sitting next to you, the person you could never love again because of the hurt/pain—all have the **same flaw**: **YOU/I are still unrighteous before God by our works.** We fail to live up to God's holy expectations. For every sin of our **speech**, our **thoughts**, our **actions** – we deserve hell. For our **lack of trust** in God, our **defiance** of His Word, our **apathy** to his worship, our **stinginess** with his gifts, our **neglect** of his sacrament, we are accountable. **Our pathetic record** of keeping God #1, not using his name in vain/remembering his Sabbath Day, obeying authority, not hating, not leading chaste/decent lives, taking something not ours, destroying a reputation, or coveting what we shouldn't have – God's sentence is justified. We have NO excuse: **every mouth is silenced & the whole world held accountable to God** and as Isaiah wrote: **all our righteous acts are like filthy rags.** {Is 64:6}

2

If you don't like what you're hearing, you can get up and leave. But that won't change anything, because you're **still unrighteous before God.** Luther taught the Bible for 5 yrs before the 95 theses. During his studies, the Lord moved him to understand a truth that exploded in his heart. He came to discover that **HE WAS DECLARED RIGHTEOUS BEFORE GOD BY CHRIST'S WORK**, not his. And he stood for that truth for the rest of his life. And today **HERE WE STAND...500 years later** knowing the truth that sets us free.

But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law & the prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe....for all 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. Luther discovered that the righteousness of God is something **God gives** to the sinner **by grace**, not something earned by the sinner. Jesus redeemed us, bought us back from sin, death, and the devil by his death on the cross, freely and fully forgiving all our sins, and rising from the grave to guarantee an open door to paradise when our lives end on this earth. For Luther, facing God in death was no longer a monster, but simply the path from earth to heaven. And Jesus Christ paved the path for him, for us, for every sinner without any cost or merit on your part. This gift of life is free – and you don't have to lift a finger to have it. It is **GRACE ALONE**, yours by **FAITH ALONE!** The righteousness of God means the grace and mercy of God poured out into us through Christ, whereby we are considered righteous before Him.

We are declared righteous. In the Greek, that's a court term. In God's courtroom, He is judge/jury. **We stand before him completely guilty** of our sins as the evidence is stacked up against us. This is a no-brainer. The jury doesn't need deliberations as there is no hope. But the **JUDGE** says: **YOU ARE FREE, YOU ARE DECLARED RIGHT WITH ME**, because Jesus paid for your offenses. The Judge didn't let the offences go, he just made Jesus pay their punishment. **A person is JUSTIFIED (declared righteous) by faith apart from observing the Law.** You are declared righteous before God by Christ's work. Fellow believers, that's where we stand 500 years later.

What would Luther think of all the notoriety he's getting this weekend? Why he didn't even want his name used by his followers. He said: **"Stop, who is Luther? Why should I receive such honor & praise? I am but a poor foul carcass. I did nothing. Christ did everything. Therefore I beg you, do not speak of Luther, but of Luther's Christ!"** So today, we speak of Luther's Christ!

On the top of p. 18 of your bulletin, I've included some milestone anniversaries in our church's history. While the 500th gets top billing this wkend, let us not overlook the blessings God has entrusted to St. Peter over the years to our church & school, its buildings, our K2L, and even our past celebrations. All of them praise the Lord for His Word/Sacraments among us, His grace to us, and His love for us. Our buildings and the ministries that house them continue the legacy that Martin Luther has left us as Lutherans to pass on to our children & grandchildren. **God's Word is our great heritage and we pray shall be ours today and always!**

SO **HERE WE STAND** as the Law always **humble us** that we are **still unrighteous before God by our works**, but the good news of the Gospel **leads us** to Jesus to love and to serve **because we are still righteous before God by Christ's work.** That's what Luther's Christ did for him – that's what our Christ still does for us...

That's where we stand....500 years & counting! AMEN