

Happy Reformation Sunday!! The most wonderful day of the year! Well, at least for Lutheran nerds like me because we get to focus so much attention on our main guy, Martin Luther...and just a little FYI, the guy I'm referring to is not Martin Luther King Jr., the civil rights activist, but Martin Luther, the man who started the Reformation, who founded the Lutheran Church, who stood up for what he believed the church should be about, and who God truly is.

Major Lutheran nerds may bring out their full Lutheran regalia...or their Luther t-shirts or other fun keepsakes that may have some quirky Lutheran saying or a Luther quote...One of the most famous Martin Luther

quotes of all time is the phrase "Sin Boldly". Lutherans love this quote. I have seen this quote printed on tshirts, pins, and even beer glasses. Yes, this IS a quote from Luther, but it is only a part of a quote that he wrote in a letter to his friend, fellow theologian and reformer, Philip Melanchthon dated August 1, 1521. Luther writes, "Be a sinner and sin boldly, but believe and rejoice in Christ even more boldly still in Christ's mercy, for He is victorious over your sin, death and the devil." As fun as it is to use only the beginning portion of Luther's quote, we need to take the entirety of his quote seriously.

I have heard it said too many times that it's easy for a Lutheran to be comfortable because we have grace to fall

back on. We focus so much, and maybe even too much on grace! We don't take sin seriously because we know that our sins are forgiven. But whether we like it or not, and as hard as it is sometimes for us to hear, we ARE in fact sinners, the result of flawed and broken world. Sin is what causes us to think of ourselves before others, neglect the poor and the hungry in the world while we shop for things that we do not need. Sin is what causes us to disregard the feelings of others, talk behind others backs, intentional or not, and also lust after what other people have. Sin is what causes us to not trust God, instead put our trust in faulty human beings. We know what we should do, be kind to our neighbor, help the

needy, put our faith and trust in only God, and yet we don't. We continually fall short. That's human nature.

The Apostle Paul mentioned this in his letter to the Romans, the 3rd chapter- "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." Sin IS something that needs to be taken seriously. Martin Luther, himself took sin seriously, but perhaps a little too seriously. Luther entered into the Augustinian monastery in 1505. Already devastated by the fact that he was a sinner, Luther hoped that he would find peace at the monastery, instead, he became even more burdened. He had the devastating fear that because of his sins, he would be rejected by God, a powerful and angry Being, but also CONDEMNED by

Christ, and then further given over to the power of Satan.

The Church at that time taught that a person is saved through works, there was little if no, mention of grace and faith. Therefore, Luther spent many hours devoting himself to prayer, fasting, pilgrimage and confession. He was certain that God could not love a sinful being as himself. He was in spiritual despair.

To get his mind off of his sinfulness and despair, Luther began to teach the scriptures at the University of Wittenburg. It was at this time when he had a breakthrough. As he studied Romans, Luther came upon chapter 1:17 which says "In the gospel, the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written,

“The one who is righteous will live by faith.” In other words, the one who is virtuous, upstanding, good, and honorable, will live by faith. And God’s goodness is revealed through faith for faith. This changed things for Luther. God was no longer an angry God. Romans 3 also helped Luther change his perception of his salvation. The Apostle Paul did write that we all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, but Luther was able to read the rest of the sentence- we are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ.

The Message Bible translation states it clearly in an easy way for us to understand. Verses 22-26 state “Since we’ve compiled this long and sorry record as sinners (both

us and them) and proved that we are utterly incapable of living the glorious lives God wills for us, God did it for us. Out of sheer generosity he put us in right standing with himself. A pure gift. He got us out of the mess we're in and restored us to where he always wanted us to be. And he did it by the means of Jesus Christ. God sacrificed Jesus on the altar of the world to clear that world of sin. Having faith in him sets us in the clear. God decided on this course of action in full view of the public- to set the world in the clear with himself through the sacrifice of Jesus, finally taking care of the sins he had so patiently endured. God sets things right. He also makes it possible for us to live in his rightness."

Luther was able to see that salvation is a gift from God- we don't have to do anything to earn it! And we have received this gift even though we do not deserve it. It is a pure gift for unrighteous and undeserving sinners as ourselves. That is grace! What's more is that Luther saw that he was redeemed, but he also saw that he was in need of a Savior.

He knew that even though he received the grace of God through Christ's dying act on the cross, he was still a sinner! He still gave into temptations. He still felt lust in his heart. He still gave into talking behind his neighbors back. He knew he needed God. He still feared God, but trusted God's promises of salvation.



Like Luther, we should be mindful of God. We should be aware that we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Like Luther, we struggle with our sinfulness, temptations, lust, loving our neighbor. We need God! Every Sunday, we confess our sins. We confess that we are captive to sin and cannot free ourselves. We confess that we are in need of God! But do we truly believe that once we leave the church building? Are we just relying on grace and forgetting God?

After we confess our sins, we receive an absolution, a promise that the entirety of our sins have been forgiven by the grace of God. But do we trust God and his

promises once we leave the church building? Do we trust the grace and mercy of God?

Martin Luther trusted God and his grace so much, that he came upon the Castle Church in Wittenburg on October 31st, 1517 and nailed the 95 Theses to the church doors in order to reform the church that had denied people the grace of God.

Martin Luther trusted God and his grace so much that he desired all people to understand and teach their children to understand, so he wrote the Small Catechism. Luther laid out his understanding of grace in his Explanation of the 2nd article of the Apostles Creed located in the Small Catechism. It states...I believe that

Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father in eternity, and also a true human being, born of the virgin Mary, is my Lord. He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned human being. He has purchased and freed me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver, but with his holy, precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death. He has done all this in order that I may belong to him, live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in eternal righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as he is risen from the dead and lives and rules eternally. This is most certainly true."

We live in a fallen and broken world. There is no doubt about that. But thank God we have grace. We have a God who loves us despite our flaws. We have a God who forgives us even though we don't deserve it. And thank God that we are able to understand what grace is. So, as Luther states, Sin boldly! BUT believe and rejoice in Christ even more boldly. AMEN! In other words, This is most certainly true.