



President Walton's October 2019 Message

A Walk in the Footsteps of Martin Luther, focused on Jesus!



Over the past year the District has focused on the theme “Let Jesus be seen in 2019!” As we enter into this month when we celebrate the Reformation, we celebrate the legacy of a man who was so passionate about Jesus and letting Him be seen that he literally risked everything on it. The man, of course, was Martin Luther. Let his own words help you grow in your faith and life to let Jesus be seen in you!

Most of us know the story well. Young Martin, destined for Law School by decree of his father, is captivated by fear when he is nearly struck by lightning and makes a deal with God through St. Anne, mother of the Virgin Mary. He promises that he will become a monk. You can imagine how furious his father was, but Martin worked hard to be a good monk. He studied, prayed, and endured great hardship, suffering to please Jesus. None of this eased the deepening sadness in Luther’s soul. He went to Rome, and when he saw how worldly and sinfully the pope and cardinals behaved he became more disheartened. Returning to Erfurt, Luther was assigned to teach in Wittenberg.

In Wittenberg Luther became known as a great preacher, scholar and professor. God opened his heart and mind to the truth of Holy Scripture to see that man didn’t need to earn God’s forgiveness, it was a gift that had been earned by Jesus. Luther was transformed by the power of God’s Word in Romans 3: 28, ***“For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.”*** In studying God’s Word, he came to a clearer understanding that we are saved by grace through faith alone. No longer did he cower in fear that he couldn’t do enough to please God.

Luther experienced such joy and freedom he wanted every person to know and experience it. The church in his day stood in opposition to Luther’s discovery, teaching instead punishment for sin was worked out in a place called purgatory, and this punishment could be removed if people bought indulgences.

The abuses in the Church at that time so burdened Luther he was moved to action. On October 31, 1517 Luther nailed the 95 Theses to the Castle Church door in Wittenberg. The posting was meant as a protest against the abuses in the church. We recognize this as the beginning of the Reformation movement that literally changed the world. Over the course of the rest of his life, Luther would continue to battle the abuses in the church for the

sake of the Gospel. Often it placed his life in danger, and yet Luther boldly would live out the freedom of the Gospel and proclaim the power of God's Word. Luther would write, *"From the beginning of my Reformation I have asked God to send me neither dreams, nor visions, nor angels, but to give me the right understanding of His Word, the Holy Scriptures; for as long as I have God's Word, I know that I am walking in His way and that I shall not fall into any error or delusion."* God's Word became his guide, and thus he would proclaim "Sola Scriptura!" (Scripture Alone!)

Luther powerfully proclaimed salvation by God's grace alone. He not only came to understand this grace personally, but taught it with great joy. He once said, *"We are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone."* This is true for us even today. Faith that saves will naturally result in actions that undergird that faith and can be seen by the world. This is why we are focused on letting Jesus be seen in our lives! He's given us the freedom to do this!

The power of God's grace relieved his sin-burdened conscience. He is remembered to have said, *"Be a sinner and sin boldly, but believe and rejoice in Christ even more boldly."* While Luther is often misunderstood, he was really saying that in spite of our sin, we have an even greater Savior who has the power to forgive. Yet, Luther also understood that we continue to daily struggle with sin. In fact, Luther also said, *"Strange, though I am saved from sin, I am not saved from sinning."* The same is true for each of us. Each day, as we repent and remember our baptism, we receive the abundance of God's grace and forgiveness. This reliance on the grace of Jesus shaped Luther's ministry and his life. It is no wonder that he proclaimed "Sola Gratia!" (Grace Alone!)



For Luther it was more than simply what he believed. It was a matter of living faith out, or as we have been saying, letting Jesus be seen! Luther wrote, *"The whole being of any Christian is faith and love. Faith brings the person to God, love brings the person to people."* How we live really does matter, and has an impact on the world all around us. Luther was known to say, *"Pray like it all depends on God, then when you are done, go work like it all depends on you."* In other words, God has given us all our senses, He has blessed us with gifts and abilities, and He has enabled us to use them to His glory and our good. He gave us gifts so we could use them! How we operate in faith, trusting God's purpose and plan is extremely important, especially when so many around us are searching for truth. Luther also proclaimed, "Sola Fide!" (Faith Alone!) Faith is a witness and testimony of how God works among His people.

Many of us feel that living out our faith is a difficult task, and yet it doesn't have to be. There are probably others who could do it better, more creatively. I've often said, God is not as interested in your abilities as He is in your availability. When we make ourselves available to God, meager as our gifts may seem, He will use us in powerful ways, and you may just be the life He uses to begin transforming another. As Luther said, *"God created the world out of nothing, and so long as we are nothing, He can make something out of us."*

Each of us are called to be His servants. While it is good to serve the church and God's people, there are people all around us who still need to actually hear who Jesus is. While we remain sinners in need of His grace, we know where to turn with the weight of our sin. We turn to Jesus. Many wander in darkness, seeking light of some kind. God has chosen us to shine the light of Jesus into the darkness all around us. Luther wrote, *"But know that to serve God is nothing else than to serve your neighbor and do good to him in love, be it a child, wife, servant, enemy, friend... If you do not find yourself among the needy and the poor, where the Gospel shows us Christ, then you may know that your faith is not*

right, and that you have not yet tasted of Christ's benevolence and work for you." The harvest remains plentiful. We simply need to move outside of the boundaries of the church, where we will find many who are willing, and many who resist, but still need to hear about the love and forgiveness of Jesus.

For Luther it was all about Jesus and the power of His Word. Luther recoiled at the thought of people using his name and following him. Luther didn't want people to think he was focused on himself. He wanted people to follow Jesus! Late in his life he would write, "The first thing I ask is that people should not make use of my name, and should not call themselves Lutherans but Christians. What is Luther? The teaching is not mine. Nor was I crucified for anyone...How did I, poor stinking bag of maggots that I am, come to the point where people call the children of Christ by my evil name?" So still today our focus needs to be more on Jesus and less on Luther. In fact, Luther might even say we need to focus more on being truly followers and doers of Jesus and not simply followers of Martin Luther!

We boldly and proudly call ourselves Lutherans because Martin Luther focused on Jesus. As we prepare once again to celebrate the Reformation, may that be our focus, too. It's all about Jesus! Maybe Luther never said, "Let Jesus be seen in 1517!" However, his life, his teaching, his writings, all point us to Jesus. What a joy that because we stand that great tradition we can boldly proclaim, "Let Jesus be seen in 2019!" May this be our Reformation cry now and always!

In His peace,

Greg



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