

Grace to you and peace from God, our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Happy 500th Anniversary of the Reformation. I can't think of a better time to talk about the life of a man who changed the world.

A man who was a revolutionary thinker, an against the grain sort of man that sought truth over prestige, and selflessness over pride.

In fact, I'm bold enough to believe that there has never been a better man to walk on the face of the earth.

If not for Him there would be no Lutherans, if not for Him our ancestors would have never formed the LCMS, if not for Him there wouldn't be an Our Redeemer Lutheran Church in Iowa City, IA.

This man was born to a poor family. As a boy, His parents sought out the best education for their Son. They wanted to raise Him in a godly manner, teaching Him God's truths from the get go. His father was a hardworking man, as were most men of those days. Soft spoken but diligent in his trade; His father was well known in the land for his work ethic and craftsmanship.

Worshiping God was important to the entire family. They kept to the traditions of the church and raised their Son to walk in the ways of God. From an early age, he exhibited great intelligence and many talents. All people who came in contact with Him raved about how incredible this boy was. He seemed destined to become a preacher.

This however was not the desire of His family.

His father wanted Him to have a job that could support the family for the rest of their lives. His own mother seemed to “not get it” at times.

Nonetheless, as time passed He did become a preacher, a theologian and a Man of God that changed the world.

As He began His ministry He ran into great difficulty early on. The pastors of His time, the scholars and experts of the Word, were twisting God's truth to meet their own selfish needs. The church of His time was proclaiming that you had to gain favor in the eyes of

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God to be saved. Gain favor by your own deeds, not by God's mercy. He could not stomach this self-righteous view. Because, He knew the truth must be proclaimed. So, against the church of His time, He stood for truth.

As you can probably guess this was not received very well by the church.

How can this Man tell us we are wrong? Who does He think He is? And to think we thought He might make a good pastor some day!

His enemies were mounting. His stance against the church, against the traditions, and against the sinful convictions of the people made Him enemy number one.

Quickly, the leaders of the church gathered together and decided to label His beliefs as grounds for excommunication. In fact, they even deemed Him as Satan himself and that His stance deserved the penalty of death.

His followers were growing fewer and fewer, and the ones who stood by His side were becoming very nervous. They decided that they were going to hide their great teacher from the sword of death wielded by the church.

When hiding He was constantly in prayer, and constantly concerned with God's will for Him. He prayed for His followers, He prayed for His oppressors, and He prayed for the church.

Soon, however, it was time to go back.

It was time to face the blood thirsty leaders of the church.

It was time to face the leaders of the government.

It was time to stand before them in court. And so stand before them He did. All eyes were upon Him penetrating Him with thoughts that shouted out murder. The leaders of the church told their side of the tale to the government. They described their hate, their envy, and their evil intentions like a dog foaming at the mouth waiting to strike.

Yet despite this, there He stood.

And then the court turned to Him and asked if these accusations were true. You could hear a pin drop at this moment in time.

And yet...there He stood. A righteous man. Motionless...drained...and proclaiming the Gospel.

There He stood in the courtroom before Pilot.

There He stood on the road to Golgotha.

And there He stood upon the Hill of Calvary where He hung pouring out forgiveness. Pouring out His righteousness for all of us, all of us who are slaves to sin.

Jesus never wavered, Jesus never thought twice about dying for you or dying for me.

This is why no greater Man has ever walked the earth. This is why without Jesus, Our Redeemer Lutheran Church in Iowa City, Iowa wouldn't be here.

How many of you thought I was talking about Martin Luther? ...

How did it make you feel when I said without Him Our Redeemer wouldn't be here?

Well if I was talking about Luther that would be an example of self-righteousness. It distorts the truth and looks to ourselves instead of God. Those who say we are self-righteous say we puff out our chests and view ourselves as better people, more knowledgeable about God, and thus more worthy of God's love. In a sense, they are saying we view ourselves as being made too clean to labor and toil and get our hands dirty with them.

In contrast, the apostle Paul says, in our Epistle reading, "remember, brothers, our labor and toil: we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God." (1 Th 2:9).

Our self-righteousness is a burden to ourselves and to our neighbor. You see, this message is for you and me, God's hands and feet. And as God's hands and feet we are to get them dirty. We are to follow the example of Christ. We are to go where the hurt is and share God's healing.

He made you to proclaim the Gospel in your life to everyone He lovingly places in your life. From the grocery clerk to the garbage collector...you are to be Christ to them.

You are to love them, that's right...to love them, to talk to them, to show them the hope you have. You are to be "ready to share with [them] not only the gospel of God but also [your] own selves." (1 Th 2:8).

So we need to ask ourselves, as Lutherans, "Are we singing a self-righteous tune?" God calls us to walk in a manner "worthy of God" not worthy of ourselves. We are to walk in a manner worthy of His kingdom and His glory, not our own.

As Luther liked to reiterate, "our good works are like filthy rags." They are filthy because, we view our good works as OUR good works, instead of GOD's works through us. We do this all the time, don't we? ...

I'm a good Christian, I come to church I pray, I believe, I care about "those people"...in fact I'm so glad pastor preached that sermon because I know some of those in church needed to hear that! ...

Have we been made too clean?

The true righteousness is the righteousness that looks to God and not to the self. To understand this righteousness, we need look no further than the question that haunted Martin Luther. The question for which his learning provided no help, "how does a sinner get right with an all-holy God?"

Luther was not just worrying about trivial matters. And he was certainly not neurotic. He simply knew that God is not to be trifled with, that sin is undeniable and judgment inescapable.

It was the spiritual director of the monastery, John Staupitz, who finally shed some light on Luther's perplexity by telling Luther, "Look to the wounds of Christ, for there you will find a full and sufficient pardon."

And then it happened! While he was reading Paul's Epistle to the Romans, he stumbled on a text which rang with the profoundest truth, and which continues to echo in the hearts of God's people everywhere: "The righteous shall live by faith" (Ro 1:17).

From 1521 until his death in 1546 a reward was promised to anyone who killed Luther. Yet, He remained undeterred.

He was asked where he would be if the worst should happen – that is, if he and everything he stood for were trampled and destroyed. His reply? "I shall be then where I am now: in the hands of God."

So may the Hands of God, which He dirtied with our sins be an example for our own hands. Hands which we are invited to dirty by proclaiming the freedom and the righteousness that was given to us through the life of a righteous Man, Jesus Christ.

Now on this, the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, go and be His hands...AMEN!

"Now may the God of peace... equip you with everything good that you may do his will, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen." (Heb 13:20-21)
