

Reformation Sunday /October 25, 2020
John 8:31-36/Christ Alone
Holy Spirit Lutheran Church
Pastor Jerry Stobaugh

“...the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”

Today is Reformation Sunday and is good time to review what the church believes, teach and confesses about how we are justified, sanctified and kept in the one true faith. The phrases, commonly referred to as the “Solae” of the church; namely, Grace Alone, Faith Alone, Scripture Alone, Christ Alone and Glory to God Alone. These are printed on the front of your bulletin and let us spend time talking about each one.

First is Grace Alone . I’ve heard it described as an acronym: God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense. A good description of the word to a Christian. Our salvation is a gift because of the person and work of Christ Jesus alone. We have no function in creating, obtaining or maintaining our salvation. This is what God’s Grace means, He gives out of pure love for us even though we don’t deserve it. Think about the Gospel in a nutshell, [John 3:16] “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” Here God declares His Grace as a free gift by giving the entire world salvation through His only-begotten Son. We are justified before God because of Grace through faith in Christ alone.

God in his foreknowledge, formulated and executed the plan of salvation through the person and work of Jesus Christ, God reconciles sinners to Himself. He took out His wrath and punishment all sinners rightly deserve on the body of His Son on Good Friday. A body, beaten, whipped, pierced and hung on a cross to die an excruciating painful death. It is only through this gift can we ever

hope to escape eternal damnation for the sins we have, are and will commit. This was the cost of God's Grace to us. It costs us nothing; but it cost God the tortured death of His beloved Son.

Our next statement is Faith Alone. This is where our Gospel reading comes in and why it was chosen as the reading for Reformation Sunday. The reading appears to be pretty straight forward with the theme being "...the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed." So how are we free? Looking into the Gospel, we see in the beginning of verse 31 the little "if" clause. While we generally mean "if" to be an either-or phrase; in Greek several meanings may come from this usage; first you continue in Christ (meaning something you're doing already); second meaning, you would continue in Christ (something you're not doing right now), third, you were but are not anymore. Most likely Jesus means the first option, you believe and trust in the Christ and continue that action into the future. So, Jesus is saying have faith and trust. But what do we have faith and trust in?

Unfortunately, the translation misses the mark with the inclusion of the personal pronoun "my" in this verse. This is unfortunate because what Jesus is actually taking about is Himself. So, the meaning would be much clearer if it read "If you abide in the Word..." meaning we abide in Christ. Earlier in the John's Gospel we read, [John 1:14] "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." So, Jesus is here saying have faith in me!

Now one definition of the word "abide" is "to live, endure, sustain, or withstand without yielding or submitting". You may be asking yourself, how do I abide in the Word, in Christ? In your Baptism! This is where the wet Word was placed on you and you in Christ. St. Paul's letter to the Romans records, [Rom 6:3-5] "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized

into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.” So, you now live in Christ as a new creature. When God the Father looks on you, He doesn’t see the stain of sin of the old Adam, but the robe of righteousness His Son earned for you on the cross. The Father sees only another son or daughter in His family, clothed in the likeness of the one perfect Son. This why we stress to remember your baptism that you die to your sins daily and live in Christ forever.

So, you are already in “the Word” but how do you endure? That is where faith comes in. Faith is another gift of God and is imparted by the person and work of the Holy Spirit. In Baptism, most of us first encounter faith. Faith alone is what holds onto the promises of God. This faith is sustained through the Word; reading and hearing the Scriptures in their truth and purity. Faith is also strengthened and preserved when we partake in the sacrament of Holy Communion. When we consume the very body and blood of Jesus, we not only are in Christ, but we have Christ inside of us! Therefore, we are not only in the Word but the Word is also in you!

This brings us to another Solae, Scripture alone. While Christ is “the Word” in today’s Gospel, the Word also refers to God’s Word that through the inspiration and enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, was written for us and as St. Paul writes in his second letter to Timothy, [2 Tim 3:16-17] “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”

God's Word is where He reveals His will for us and the plan of salvation implemented to save us from ourselves. This again is a gift from God, part of God's Grace to us. Scripture is also the sole bases of our Lutheran confessions. The Book of Concord helps explain doctrines of the church, but it is never equal to or placed over the Word of God. One remarkable feature of the bible as we have it in our hands today, is much the same as it was a hundred years ago and even further back. While some quibble about what certain passages mean and issues with adding or phrasing verses to fit a theology, for the most part the bible we have today is the same as our ancestors had for centuries. God preserves His Word, both written and His Son, for His people.

Glory to God is another Solae of the church. This means God does everything for us. We have no merit or glory of our own, but only what God delivers to us by Grace. He saves us by Grace through Faith by the work of Holy Spirit on behalf of the work of His Son Jesus Christ alone. We have nothing to offer but to Praise God in response to what He gave us.

Our last Solae we will consider this day is Christ Alone. I believe this is the foundation for all others of Solae of the Church. Everything we've talked about today has Christ as its foundation. He is the Word incarnate; He lived the perfect sinless life. He exchanged His righteousness for our sins and paid the price on the cross. Hearing the Words of Christ imparts faith. Scripture finds all its fulfilment in Christ. Christ alone is why we have eternal life.

This brings us to our theme verse. Christ is the Son that sets us free. It is all His work and not by our own power or effort. By our very nature, we are slaves to sin as St. Paul writes, [Rom 6:20-21] "For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. But what fruit were you getting at that time from the

things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death.” This is how we are by our very nature. This is what we do day in and day out. But thanks to God’s Grace the Word continues, [Rom 6:22-23] “But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” This is how the Son sets us free.

Now I wish I could say we’re free from sin, but we’re not. In fact, you, I and all believers in the Christ are both sinners and saints at the same time. Martin Luther had a term for this “*simul iustus et peccator*” (simultaneously justified and sinner). So, as we live here in time, we sin daily and much, but we live justified in God’s eyes because of what Christ did for us. This dichotomy continues until we die here in time, or the Good Lord returns to establish the new Heavens and the new Earth.

This is the Gospel discovered Luther over 500 years ago and why we celebrate the reformation. Why we strive to remember what God has done and does for us every day. Why we print the Solae on our bulletin every week; to remind us how we are saved, though whom and by what means. We live solely by Grace Alone, Faith Alone, Scripture Alone, Christ Alone and Glory to God Alone now and into eternity in the new heavens and the new earth.