

## Reformation Sunday

Romans 1.16 *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 17 For in it [the Gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "the righteous shall live by faith."*

In 1483, when Martin Luther was 10 years old, a woodcut art was published that depicted "Christ the Judge". On the top half of the woodcut Christ the Judge sits on a rainbow. John the Baptist, and Mary [mother of Jesus], are on either side interceding for those being judged. Angels are directly below Christ the Judge, blowing trumpets.

A Lillie extends from Christ the Judge's right ear signifying the redeemed who below are being ushered into paradise by angels.

From Christ the Judge's left ear protrudes a sword, symbolizing the doom of the damned whom the devil drags from their graves into flames of hell.

This woodcut was the most familiar figure illustrated in the books of that period. Luther testified that he was utterly terror-stricken at the sight of Christ the Judge.

The image of Christ the Judge stayed with Luther, even as He entered the monastery at age 22. Of those years he said: *"I did not think about women, money, or possessions; instead my heart trembled and fidgeted about whether God would bestow His grace on me. . . . For I had strayed from faith and could not but imagine that I had angered God, whom I in turn had to appease by doing good works".* He said, *"If I could believe that God was not angry with me, I would stand on my head for joy"*.

Luther's father confessor at that time was Fr. John Staupitz. He tired of Luther's incessant confession, particularly of made-up sins. He recognized Luther's genius. He directed Luther to a doctorate in theology, and placed him as chair of theology of the university at Wittenberg. One could almost hear Dr. Staupitz saying: Martin, Martin, go and learn about the Grace of God.

And so he did. From 1513 to 1518 Luther lectured on Psalms, Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews. Luther, a year before he died, reminisced this about happened in 1519...what we know as Luther's Tower Experience:

*Meanwhile in that same year, 1519, I had begun interpreting the Psalms once again. I felt confident that I was now more experienced, since I had dealt in university courses with St. Paul's Letters to the Romans, to the Galatians, and the Letter to the Hebrews. I had conceived a curing desire to understand what Paul meant in Romans, but thus far there had stood in my way that one word which is in chapter one: "The justice of God is revealed in it." I hated that word, "justice of God," which by the custom of all my teachers meant that justice by which God is just and by which he punishes sinners and the unjust." [think of the lasting effect of the Christ the Judge woodcut of Luther's youth]*

*I meditated night and day on those words until at last, by the mercy of God, I paid attention to their context: "The justice of God is revealed in it, as it is written: 'The just person lives by faith.'" I began to understand that in this verse the justice of God is that by which the just person lives by a gift of God, that is by faith. I began to understand that this verse means that the justice of God is revealed through the Gospel, but it is a passive justice by which the merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written: "The just person lives by faith." All at once I felt that I had been born again and entered into paradise itself through open gates. Immediately I saw the whole of Scripture in a different light.*

*I exalted this sweetest word of mine, "the justice of God," with as much love as before I had hated it with hate. This phrase of Paul was for me the very gate of paradise.*

**Passive Righteousness** [Righteousness of God] is ours through the perfect life, innocent death and powerful resurrection of Jesus Christ, and freely offers forgiveness of our sin.

**Passive Righteousness** is...

John the Baptist, saying of Jesus in John 1: *Behold the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world.*

The Apostle John, writing of Jesus in chapter 3: *For God so loved the world that He gave His only son, that whoever believes in Him may not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send His son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him may be saved.*

Jesus saying of himself:

- *He who has the Son has life. He will not pass into judgment, but has passed from death into life.*
- *I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me though he dies, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die.*
- *I am the way the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me.*

**Passive Righteousness** is the vertical relationship between God and people. God, through Christ, does the work. The only contribution people bring to this relationship is sin. This is a righteousness that is alien; it is completely outside ourselves.

**Passive Righteousness** has a companion called **Active Righteousness**. About the Two Kinds of Righteousness Luther writes:

*This is our theology, by which we teach a precise distinction between these two kinds of righteousness, the active and the passive."*

**Active Righteousness** is...

Jesus saying in John 13: *A new commandment I give you, that you love one another as I have loved you. By this will all people know that you are my disciples, because you love one another.*

The Apostle Paul writing in Ephesians 4: *I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*

**Active Righteousness** is the horizontal relationship that places believers into relationships in, communities, neighborhoods, families and jobs to fulfill their God-given vocations. God does not need our good works, but our neighbor does.

Ephesians 2.8-10 places passive and active righteousness in biblical order.

*For is by grace you have been saved, through faith. This is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not by works so that no one may boast. For we are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God has prepared in advance for us to do, that we should walk in them.*

The natural flow of **Passive Righteousness** [the vertical saving relationship we have with God through Christ's life, death and resurrection] and **Active Righteousness** [the horizontal relationship we have with community, neighborhood, family and work] is what Martin Luther called **Christian Vocation** [being husband, wife, brother sister, friend, worker]. It is through **Christian Vocation** that natural relationships are formed, conversations take place, the gospel is shared and the Kingdom of God grows.

We are at week five of **Red Letter Challenge – Going** – the last section. **Red Letter Challenge**, chapter five, is an **Active Righteousness/Christian Vocation** chapter. As the author previews 'Going' He advised: **Don't go on the trip and miss the adventure, when we go we do not go alone, and, don't understand what God will do through you and your story.**

Even a trip to the store is an adventure. God goes with us. And, as we God He is already in that place acting redemptively. We can choose to walk in with spiritual eyes and ears alert to see what God may be up to, and how he would have us be a part of it...an encouraging word, a conversation, a time of prayer, God loves to make those appointments.

From Psalm 121: The Lord bless your coming and your **going**...from this time forth and forevermore.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Prayers of the Church, Reformation Sunday – October 25, 2020

In the power of the Spirit, let us pray to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ for the world, the Church, and one another.

Heavenly Father, thank you for the faith and zeal of reformers, past and present, who articulate, defend and preserve the Gospel of salvation. Thank you for all the faithful people in every land and every age who have preferred nothing whatsoever to Christ Jesus, and him crucified. Keep us in their company through the life-giving fire of your most Holy Spirit.

Pour out your Holy Spirit upon your Church. Make it your holy habitation. Keep it steadfast in your Word. Strengthen it in the face of temptation. Defend it from evil. Reform and purify it from sin and error. And bestow on it your saving peace.

Be the refuge and strength of Christians who are persecuted for confessing Jesus as Lord. Cause the enemies of the Gospel to repent of their sinfulness, that they may turn to you and live.

Graciously protect and guide the people of this congregation, O Lord, our Strength and our Redeemer. Give us glad hearts and joyful service to be known by love, live by faith and be voices of hope to our neighbors.

Exalt yourself among the nations, and speak your holy word to the leaders of the world. Establish among all peoples that peace which the world cannot give; and teach us to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly before you.

We lift before you the needs of all whose lives are shaken and troubled by suffering of mind, body, or spirit. Especially we pray for: {List}. Restore them all to health and hope, that they may proclaim the awesome things you have done.

Holy Father, thank you for the lives of believers who now rest in eternal Glory. Grant that we may humbly follow in their footsteps; boldly trust in your promises; faithfully live in your Word; and cheerfully serve in your Name. Then, at life's end bring us into your eternal home, where with all the redeemed, we shall glorify you forever and ever and unto the ages of ages.

For Jesus' sake, grant the fulfillment of all we ask that conforms to your holy will. Amen.