

Grace, mercy, and peace to you, from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

My text is 2 Corinthians 1.19 & 20: For the Son of God – Jesus Christ – whom we proclaimed among you was not "Yes" **and** "no"; but in Him it is always "yes". For in Jesus every one of God's promises is a "yes!"

Jesus is God's great "Yes"!

All that God is, is poured into ... Jesus.

All of God's love is to be found in ... Jesus.

Every promise that God has made is fulfilled in ... Jesus.

Jesus is God's great "Yes"! That is our text and our theme.

___Today is **Reformation Day**. The birthday of the Lutheran Church. You'll note that Luther's Coat of Arms prominently displayed on banners about the sanctuary and on the cover of your worship folder. We talked about that in School Chapel on Wednesday. I noted for the children that what we use to call a "coat of arms" would today be called a **logo**. The "golden arches" tell you "this is where you can get a hamburger". The "swoosh" tells you "this is a pair of shoes that will make you a winner. The Lutheran logo communicates who we are as Lutherans.

Who are we Lutherans? Obviously has something to do with Martin Luther (vs. Martin Luther King). Martin Luther was a priest who dug deeply into Scripture. And when he did he realized that the Church of his day had departed from some of the ancient teachings of Church. The church had veered off the real Catholic tradition.

"Catholic" is a good, Lutheran word. We see ourselves as "Catholic" Christians. Not "Roman Catholic" –but part of the "Catholic" tradition goes all the way back to day one, all the way back to Pentecost. The word "catholic" means "universal", and there was a time when the Church truly was "universal". Everywhere the Church believed and did the same things. Human beings what we are, that probably lasted about 15 minutes. Divisiveness and divisions set in very quickly. The Church quickly became fractured. God, however, looks at us and sees the Church as One, made up of everyone who has faith in Christ regardless of what congregation or denomination they may claim. And for us, the word "Catholic" acknowledges God's view of things and looks back nostalgically to a time when the Church was more truly "one". A very ancient time, to be sure. But a time when the Church walked one path.

Luther dug into scripture and saw the church of his day had veered off that path.

Some of it was maybe issues people would consider pretty **small**. The celibacy of the priesthood, for example. The Bible talks about Peter and other Apostles being married, so clergy were not required to be celibate at the very beginning. Celibacy of the clergy is not part of the real Catholic tradition. Celibacy wasn't required until the 1200's. To Luther who lived in the 1500's, celibacy of the clergy looked "new fangled". The Church, Luther said, needs to go back to the ancient, catholic tradition of the Church.

Here's another example that's maybe a bit more important: in Luther's day lay people only allowed to receive the bread in Holy Communion. Luther realized there was nothing like that in Scripture. When Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, he said "take and drink" to everyone who was present. The practice of denying the wine to lay people also started in the 1200's. Luther saw the church of his day departing from what had always be the universal, catholic tradition of the Church. The Church, Luther said, needs to go back to the ancient, catholic tradition of the Church.

And the Church of Luther's day had departed from Biblical teaching in some very **big** ways. The Church in Luther's day was **selling** forgiveness, teaching that Christ's sacrifice on the cross did not pay in full for sin, there was some payment left that you had to make. But, the Church would sell you the indulgence that would release you from suffering for your unpaid sin. And **that** was a very, very **big** thing. The Church, Luther said, needs to go back to the ancient, catholic tradition of the Church.

Martin Luther went to the Church of his day and said I've gone back into the Bible and back into our history and I've discovered some very important things. We've gotten away from some of the clear teachings of the Bible and we've gotten away from some of the ancient, catholic traditions, and we need to return to them! We need to be guided by 3 simple principles: Grace alone ... faith alone ... scripture alone.

Lutherans are not (should not be) a "separate" church. In fact Luther insisted that we who follow in his theological footsteps not call ourselves "Lutherans". That's what *others* called us ... and it stuck.

What we are is part of the conversation within the "universal" church, a voice that can be heard saying "grace alone, faith alone, scripture alone".

Grace alone.

We are saved because **God** is gracious, and **only** because God is gracious. That we are made right with God is by God's grace, and **only** because of God's grace. Not because of any merit or worthiness in us. Not because we have been good or sincere or tried hard. Not because we earn God's favor by doing good deeds. But by **grace...grace alone.**

"Grace alone" is represented on our "logo" by cross. We are made right with God by the death and resurrection of Christ. The death of God's Son on the cross paid in full any and all debts that I owe God. His death on the cross was an act of God's grace. And His cross is at the center of all we believe and do as Lutherans.

Grace alone.

Faith alone.

There is only one way to be connected to God's offer of grace, and that is thru faith in Jesus Christ. Faith is my hand which God has opened so that I might receive all of the riches of God's grace that He pours out through Christ.

Faith is represented on our logo by the cross in the heart. When I asked the children in chapel on Wednesday "whose heart is that?", a lot of the children said "God's".

Well, God **is** love. God loved us so much he sent his son Jesus. And God's love *could* be represented by a heart.

But on our logo – that's our heart. And our logo is saying that's where Jesus wants to dwell. In **your** heart. Jesus doesn't want to be just a character in a dusty old book sitting on your coffee table, or a model of righteous living. Jesus wants to dwell in our hearts. Jesus living in our hearts is faith. And it's that faith that connects us to God's grace.

Faith alone.

Scripture alone.

There's only one place where we learn of God's amazing grace, and there is only one place where we can come to faith in Jesus and that place is where the Holy Spirit – the Giver of Life – dwells, the living Word of God that is cradled for us in Holy Scripture.

Our faith, our teaching, our worship, our practice are guided by scripture and by scripture alone. Not by the dictates of Popes or Councils or even Synodical Conventions. But by Scripture alone. Holy Scrip is our guiding light, our northern star, our chart and compass.

Today may be the birthday of the **Lutheran** Church, but even if you are **not** a Lutheran, you have reason to celebrate. If you are a member of a church that treasures the Word, that encourages you to dig into the Word, remember that Martin Luther was one of the first and most vocal to take the Bible out of the hands of the theologians, translate it into the language of common people, and put the Bible **into** the hands of lay people. Everyone who belongs to a “Bible-believing” or “Bible centered” church, is a child of the Reformation.

Scripture alone!

So, who are we Lutherans? We are the voice in the universal church proclaiming we have LIFE with God **only** by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ which comes to us thru the reading and hearing of scripture. Grace alone, faith alone, and scripture alone.

It is a positive message and a voice that needs to be heard above all those Christians who are projecting a negative image. And there’s too much of that today. Too many Christians who define themselves by what they are against and project to the world an image of Christians as a people who are intolerant if not dripping with anger and hatred. Recently the public face of Christ has been the image of a Pastor who wants to burn Qu’rans and those protesting at funerals with signs that say “God hates ...”. And it doesn’t make any difference what follows on those signs: “Fags” or “Left Handed People”. **Any** sign that states “God hates” anything is a misrepresentation of the God who loved the world so much that He sent His son Jesus. Last week the public image of Christians was the Arkansas School Board member who claimed to be a Christians and rejoiced that the bullied children in California had committed suicide. Our own Lutheran Church Missouri Synod has been identified as opposing public prayer after the 911 tragedy, and many of our recent public pronouncements have a less-than-loving homophobic tone.

I’m not saying that we are not against things. We are. We have to take stands. St. Paul was against many things and they are documented in his letters. But when it came to defining himself and his ministry, he always spoke @ what he was for: "I am not ashamed of the Gospel for it is God's power for the salvation of everyone who believes."

As Catholic Christian with a Lutheran voice, we have so much that we are for, so much to be positive about, so much good news to share, that we can and should be positive in our witness.

Lutherans?

We are people who are for the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and want to share God's **love** with everyone. We have good news: God's gift of salvation by God’s grace alone through faith in Jesus Christ alone found in scripture alone. We are for all the people of God – men, women, and children – having the opportunities to use the gifts of God in the service of God. We are for all people coming to experience God’s love with us.

Jesus Christ is God's great **YES!**:

Yes, God loves us!

Yes, God forgives us!

Yes, God has made a place for us ... with Him ... for eternity.

May we Ascension Lutherans be God's great **YES!** to the community around us:

Yes, God loves you!

Yes, God forgives you!

Yes, God has made a place for you ... with Him ... through Jesus Christ:

Amen!