

Redeemed, Renewed, Reformed

This month we will celebrate the Reformation. The actual day that marks the beginning of the 16th century Reformation of the church is October 31st. It was on All Hallows Eve (Eve of All Saints Day or Halloween as it is now called.), in 1517 that Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenburg, Germany.

Martin Luther was a young priest, who like many of us was looking for something that would give him peace in his soul and with God. He was hoping for a life in which God would regard him with favor. He was searching for the assurance that he would enjoy eternal blessedness with God in heaven. The false teaching of his day tormented his soul. He was taught to look for peace with God in his own good works. But he found no peace in what he did. He found only more and more sin.

In his search for God's grace, he found God's anger against him. The more he strove to save himself from hell that more convinced he became that he was going to hell. He was looking for his life in himself when what he saw in himself only showed his slavery to sin and death. A slavery from which he couldn't set himself free. Martin Luther went through a self imposed hell on earth before the peace he was looking for found him and that peace was Christ and Martin and the Church were Reformed.

To say that Martin and we are saved by grace is to say that we are saved by Jesus. Grace and Jesus go together. St. Paul says that we are "justified freely by God's grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." (Romans 3:24). There is no forgiveness, there is no grace, and there is no love from God except in Jesus. Any notion of heaven or peace with God apart from Jesus is a false dream. Jesus and grace go together and cannot be separated. So we confess that we are saved by grace alone.

Today Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world. I once knew a Muslim by the name of Fahad with whom I attended college in Minnesota. He was very friendly, a good friend, and more than willing to share his views about God. As a Muslim, he didn't believe that Jesus had died for his sins, but he did claim to believe in God's grace. I asked him what he thought grace was. He told me that grace was when God gave you ten times as much credit for the good you do as he gives blame for the bad you do. He weighs your actions on the scale of justice and is generous in giving you even more credit than you rightly deserve for the good you do. In simple form that's grace to a Muslim. Many religions, media and even Church leaders are still making that same mistake when it comes understanding Christianity and Jesus. As in Luther's day the same ancient saying "God helps them who help themselves" is being taught. In his day he was taught that if you do the best you can do, God would take care of the rest. What he learned though was if people were really honest with themselves, could they still believe they were doing the best they could do?

In truth don't we know that we must do more? I must try harder. If I am to find God's grace and be sure that I have it, I must first do what I can. Luther's (and our) life was self-centered. He did good works so that he could get grace in return. So everything he did he really did for himself. His most religious works were his worst sins because they offered for his own benefit. God intervened. It was through the hearing of God's Word while teaching theology that God taught Luther it was by GRACE alone through FAITH alone that he was saved. (Ephesians 2:1-10.)

Jesus doesn't want us to see Him as a new Moses, as if He came into this world to teach a higher morality than the Ten Commandments. Jesus doesn't want us to see Him as the shining example of how to overcome this or that difficulty. The questions of the popular bracelets, What Would Jesus Do? (WWJD) is not the question Jesus wants us to ask. No, What did Jesus do! is the answer Jesus wants to reveal into our hearts. It is the free gift of God for the forgiveness of sins that brings us peace, assurance and eternal life with God. For God so loved us He wants us to look to Him, not as One who brings us more problems, burdens, and challenges, but as the One who has carried our burden of sin away from us forever.

St. John states it quite clearly in the prologue to his Gospel: "The law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." (John 1:17)

Redeemed, Renewed, Reformed in Our Savior,

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