

"A Revolution in Faith"
Sermon: Nov. 5, 2017
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Introduction: Romans 3: 19 – 28

[Paul prayed for the church in Rome constantly and made many plans to visit there. In this letter he still has not been able to visit and is preparing to do so.

His was addressing sophisticated, demanding readers, most of whom he had never met. He sought to set forth the whole scope of Christian doctrine, which at that time was only passed orally from town to town.

If you read all of Romans from the beginning you may see the logic of Paul's argument unfolding. He presents the good news about God's amazing grace basically saying that it is available for everyone. There are some dark passages in this book, but out of the mournful notes, comes a bright sound of great news, expressed in what some have called the central theological passage in the Bible.]

Romans 3:19-28

¹⁹Now we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. ²⁰For "no human being will be justified in his sight" by deeds prescribed by the law, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin.

Righteousness through Faith

²¹But now, apart from law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, ²²the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ^[a] for all who believe. For there is no distinction, ²³since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; ²⁴they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement^[b] by his blood, effective through faith. He did this to show his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed; ²⁶it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies the one who has faith in Jesus.^[c]

²⁷Then what becomes of boasting? It is excluded. By what law? By that of works? No, but by the law of faith. ²⁸For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law.

Martin Luther felt compelled to remind people to shift their focus from what they do [law] to what God does. [faith & grace]

At the time in which he lived, 500 hundred years ago, the church seemed to stray far from this theology. People were very critical and a split in the church relating to doctrine occurred.

- The church sold tickets of indulgences (forgiveness) from sins for money. This suggested that the rich could buy their way into Heaven while the poor could not - quite the opposite of what the Bible says.
- Many people did not understand the sermon, because it was in Latin. The sermon is that part of the service where the priest teaches people things from the Bible. Because of this, ordinary people did not know very much about Christianity.
- Religious posts were often sold to whoever was willing to pay the most money for them. See Simony. This meant many priests did not know much about Christianity. So they told the people many different things. Some of the things had little to do with what was written in the Bible.

Martin Luther found all of these things troubling and posted 95 Theses on a church door in Wittenberg, Germany and thus began a kind of Revolution of Faith. He argued that sins could not be forgiven nor could salvation be gained by making forgiveness and salvation a commercial transaction. One cannot buy forgiveness, nor can one buy a way into heaven.

From these conclusions came three major ideas which have influenced the way we understand our relationship to God to this day.

These ideas are -- retaining the Latin -- *sola Scriptura*, *sola gratia* and *sola fidei*.

Only Scripture, only by grace, only by faith.

1. *Sola Scriptura*. Central to Luther's view of the primacy of Scripture is his theology of the cross that emerges from it. Luther said that a person who tries to understand God from what can be observed about the world "does not deserve to be called a theologian."
2. *Sola gratia*. The snapshot: *Only by God's grace are we reconciled to God. Nothing we do can earn God's favor.*
3. *Sola fidel*. The snapshot: *Only trusting in Jesus puts us right with God.*

DIALOGUE:

There is a revolutionary sitting among us, a person who is working to upset the status quo, change the face of society, throw out the old way of doing things, strip away everything that is comfortable and reliable, everything that is us, who we are.

"Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a person's foes will be those of his own household."

Incendiary, isn't it? Everything changes, doesn't it? when we hear those words. Our family is no longer to be the focal point of our life. Our family is no longer part of who we are. Our family is no longer the source of order and serenity in our life. The rules are broken, and the foundation of our life isn't as solid as we thought it was.

"Those who love father or mother more than me are not worthy of me; and those who love son or daughter more than me are not worthy of me; and those who do not take their cross and follow me are not worthy of me. Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it."

Follow him. That is the call of a revolutionary. Follow him where? Follow him out of the bounds that society has said are correct. Follow him into no man's land. Follow him into a world where you've never been, into a world inhabited by strangers and outcasts—the homeless, the mentally ill, the prostitutes and pimps, the thieves, the dishonest, the immigrants, the elderly, the untouchables. In other words, the people who smell funny, talk strangely, live badly, look ugly, who may be dangerous—the people you would never, ever take out to dinner, much less invite into your home. That's where this revolutionary leads. That is where Jesus is taking us.

"When Jesus came down from the mountain, great crowds followed him. And behold, a leper came to him and knelt before him, saying, 'Lord, if you will, you can make me clean. And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, 'I will; be clean.'"

Touch the untouchables, reach out for the impossible, welcome the unthinkable. All of this leads to changes in our thinking, changes in our lives, changes in society. The great reformation of our spirits and hearts and minds is what this revolutionary is calling for: Changes—reflecting the Kingdom of God to bring in the Kingdom of God.

"The Pharisees said to his disciples, 'Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?' But when Jesus heard this, he said, 'Those who are well have no need for a physician, but those who are sick do. Go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.'"

"I desire mercy, not sacrifice." I desire action, not ceremony. I desire risk, not safety. Reformation is all about risk and changes, about going where Jesus leads, not knowing where it will end, knowing only that Jesus requires that we reform our lives, our families, our society, our very selves.

"God knows, I, Martin Luther, never thought of going as far as I did. I intended only to attack indulgences. If anybody had told me, a celibate priest, when I was at the

Diet of Worms, 'In a few years you'll have a wife and your own household, I wouldn't have believed it.'

There is a revolutionary sitting among us, a person who is working to shake up the establishment, reform the rules we live by, challenge our faith, lift us out of our rut, revise the way we think, and change the focus of our world. This is the day the universe changes, because this revolutionary is our Lord, Jesus the Christ.

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What is it we are celebrating today?

- The Reformation changing
- renewing,
- and rethinking,

so we are always following Jesus' words. Dr. Luther's 95 Theses were list of complaints he had about his church, things he saw that he thought were wrong. He called for dialog and discussion. He called for a renewal of faith and practice. He asked questions and sought answers form God through prayers and scriptures. He listened to the living Word of God. He took seriously those answers. Then, he changed the world – a revolution of faith began.

QUESTIONS:

So, is the Reformation over? Is it only in the past? Or is it reformation with a small "r"? Is reformation, making changes, part of what God wants us to do? What do we see that is wrong with our church today, our community and out world? It is, after all, a community of people who are very human and fallible.

What do the Scriptures tell us? What questions is God asking us? What is Christ calling us to do about those wrongs/

Are those wrongs *wrongs* we want to change something that God wants us to correct, or are they things we personally don't just don't like, or feel uncomfortable with?

What are we to change?

Let us hear, feel and live the Word of God. Let us ask the questions, like Martin Luther did.

Martin Luther: Only Scripture, only grace and only faith.

If you want to follow the revolutionary way of Jesus Christ perhaps the best word to remember is the word *Only*. If you leave this place repeating "**only,**" [Scripture, Grace and Faith] you will have captured the essence of Martin Luther and the Reformation that he ignited.