

Pastor's Pen

The Reverend Alvin Shrum, Pastor



October 2018

Greetings Family and Friends of St. Johannes!

This October let us thank God for our spiritual heritage. Certainly, we thank God that we have “received Christ Jesus the Lord, walk in him, and are rooted and built up in him” (Col 2:6-7). We also thank God for rooting us in a congregation that is rooted in the teaching of grace, faith, and Scripture. Concisely stated, we thank God for rooting us in Jesus Christ.

For many people, October 31 is a day to dress up in costumes and go from door to door tricking or treating and expecting for candy. For many Christians, especially those of the Lutheran tradition, October 31 is Reformation Day and on that Sunday we wear something red. On this day we celebrate God’s work through his servant, Dr. Martin Luther, to preserve the message of the Gospel as the free gift of God’s grace in Jesus Christ through faith.

As you may recall, October 31, 1517, marks the day Martin

Luther nailed 95 theses or concerns to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany, the location of the University at which he taught. The theses were written against the teachings of indulgences, purgatory, and other beliefs and practices of the church that were inconsistent with the clear teaching of the Bible.

As pastor of Wittenberg's town Church, Luther was concerned about the large number of believers who no longer came to confession and would justify this with an indulgence they bought. Indulgences were slips of paper, sold by officials of the church and signed by the pope. These slips of paper granted God's forgiveness of sins and reduced time in purgatory for the purchaser. The church was selling God's gift of forgiveness of sins that Christ intended to be free through His amazing grace!

Luther's resisted the practice of indulgences from a Biblical perspective. The Church (Catholic) eventually labeled Luther as a heretic and excommunicated him. As a result, Luther took his reform movement outside of the Church in order to preserve the true teachings of Scripture. The Reformation movement and whole Christian Church are founded on the following Biblical teachings.

Grace: At the center of the Christian faith is the assurance that salvation is based on the unearned free gift of God's grace. Though we are sinners, deserving of God's wrath and anger, we receive the gifts of his love and forgiveness.

Faith: God's gift of grace is received through faith in what Jesus has done for us. Our good works and the good things that we do flow out of having a right relationship with God, but these good things do not have the power to save or make us right with God. Ephesians says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast" (2:8-9). This is the teaching that separates Christianity from

all other world religions. Christianity alone points to what Jesus has done for us to make us right with God. Through God's Word, Baptism, and Communion, our faith is created, sustained, and nurtured.

Scripture: The Bible is the Word of God. It alone is the source for what we believe and what we practice in the Christian Church. Christ alone: Our basis and assurance of salvation is the person of Jesus Christ, his life, death, and resurrection. John tells us that "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life" (3:16).

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During October, I encourage you to take some time to remember the core teachings of Christianity that were preserved by God through Martin Luther and the Reformation. Take solace in knowing that God continues to nurture your life in Christ through grace, faith, Scripture and His Holy Sacraments.

Yours in Christ,

Pastor Alvin Shrum