

Romans 3:21-28
The Festival of the Reformation, 2017 A.✠ D.

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

In His first recorded sermon in Holy Scripture, the Lord Christ preaches: “Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.” From this we learn that there is a Kingdom of Heaven, and it is near. And that brings to each of us great hope. God is near. We also learn from our Lord’s Words that entering that Kingdom requires repentance.

Repentance has two parts: contrition and faith. Contrition is true sorrow for your sins. It means that your sins sicken you, that you believe them to be heinous and great, that it is your earnest desire to sin no more, that you believe that because of your sins you have eternally separated yourself from God. That’s contrition.

But repentance has two parts: contrition and faith. Faith claims the seemingly impossible Gospel promise that although your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow. Though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool. Faith grasps the love of God in Christ and won’t let go. Repentance is an act of faith, so faith knows the sorrow of true contrition. And the same faith claims that Gospel joy which overcomes all sorrow.

For faith believes the promise of the Prophet Isaiah: “Surely your salvation is coming; behold, His reward is with Him, and His work before Him. And they shall call them The Holy People, The Redeemed of the Lord; and you shall be called Sought Out, A City Not Forsaken.”

And yet the Words of our Lord still stand: “Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.” These are Words for you. For you are no less sinful than those Galileans to whom those Words were first directed. And the Apostle recorded them, that they might pierce your ears and needle your heart, the Word of God’s Holy Law accusing and convicting you for your transgressions, your shortcomings, your trespasses, your sins.

The blade of the Law, the slicing edge of those Ten Commands, carves back the veneer of piety and religiosity that your fallen flesh has used as a veil to conceal sinful thoughts, thoughts that at times have found expression upon your lips and in your actions. The Law exposes your sin. And so before God you are left without excuse. You have sinned. Repent! For the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.

But the flesh prefers to weasel and negotiate, to self-justify and to excuse your sins. The flesh gladly buys indulgences, sold by an even more fleshly vendor. The flesh yearns to add to Tetzels money-chest, in the false hope that as the coin clinks, your soul will be released into heaven. Which is to do violence to the Gospel.

So the Lord teaches that the Kingdom of Heaven suffers violence, and the violent to take the Kingdom by force. For if men can satisfy the debt for their own sins, if the money-chest is to be efficacious, the Promised Savior will have to be done away with. And so the world crucified Him. The Kingdom of Heaven was indeed at hand. And the fallen world murdered the King. They nailed Him to the cross.

Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the Law of faith. Repentance has two parts: contrition and faith. So 500 years ago today, half a millennium ago this night, the Blessed Reformer nailed these words to the door of the Castle Church in

Romans 3:21-28
The Festival of the Reformation, 2017 A.✠ D.

Wittenberg: “When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said ‘Repent!’, He willed that the entire life of believers be one of repentance.”

No money chest. No purgatory. No St. Peter’s. No clinking coins. No monastic orders. No treasury of merits. No self-justification. To get repentance wrong is to get salvation wrong. And to get salvation wrong is to get Christ wrong. And that – to get Christ wrong – is to lose the Christian faith entirely.

Contrition and faith. And where that is true, in you, dear Christian, in you, O Baptized, the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. For we believe that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the Law. We believe teach and confess the Apostolic Word: “For there is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, Whom God set forth as a Propitiation by His Blood, through faith...”

Faith, saving faith, faith worked by the Holy Spirit through your hearing of the Saving Gospel of Christ, true faith believes that God forgives sin, that God forgives your sin, all your sins, because of Christ. His shed Blood covers you. From His Holy Wounds alone flows the Crimson that makes you white as snow. He does so in love. He does so in mercy. He does so by grace, simply because He is the God of love.

He does so to fulfill the Gospel Promise: “to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be Just, and the Justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. For now the righteousness of God apart from the Law is revealed, being witnessed to by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe...”

To you, O Redeemed of Christ. On you, O Blessed Christian. By faith your sinfulness is made His, and His righteousness is declared to be your righteousness. For you believe that Jesus Christ, true God and true Man, died for your sins, and rose for your justification. You believe that in Him alone you have salvation, redemption, forgiveness, reconciliation with God, unity with the Holy, catholic and Apostolic Church, and eternal life.

The Lord God told the Prophet Jeremiah that He had set watchmen the walls of Jerusalem, watchmen that would not hold their peace day or night. One such watchman, set by God, was Martin Luther. Against Pope and Turk, against rulers and state, against the flesh and the world, against the devil and all his minions, God strengthened Luther to not hold his peace. God set him as a watchman. He confessed clearly and loudly the Truths of Holy Scripture.

He could not go against the Word of God or conscience. He confessed what he knew to be true from those Spirit inspired Words, penned by the Prophets and Evangelists and Apostles: that sinners are saved, that you are saved, by God’s grace through faith in Jesus Christ, alone.

May the Lord, in His superabundant mercy and boundless grace, grant each of us the boldness to stand firmly on the timeless and unchanging Gospel Truth: on Jesus Christ; and to confess with Father Luther this night, and always: “I cannot and will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand, I can do no other, so help me God. Amen.”

Romans 3:21-28
The Festival of the Reformation, 2017 A.✠ D.

Sola Gratia, Sola Fide Sola Scriptura, Solus Cristus.

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.