



“Heart of Faith”

Reformation Sunday
5:30 p.m. Saturday, October 28, 2016
The Reverend John H. Brock
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Jeremiah 31:31-34; Romans 3:19-28

Grace to you and peace, from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen.

I had a colonoscopy this week. It was the first one I've ever had. It was actually because of my desire to NOT have a colonoscopy that lead, in part, to my cardiac surgery of last year. Because I **knew** that my doctor was going to tell me I needed to have one, now that I'm over 50, and I so did NOT want to have one, that I avoided going in for an annual physical, for about seven years, which was, *perhaps*, a contributor to my cardiac adventures of last year.

But, in the seemingly unending search for an answer as to why my legs continue to swell, or more specifically, why I am retaining fluids **and** a whole bunch of stuff in my blood is off (mainly levels of things being way lower than what they should be) (which also would explain why I tend to get tired much more easily than before), I got sent to a gastroenterologist, who in turn sent me for a liver biopsy. But when Dr. F found out I had not had a colonoscopy, and that my father had colon cancer, he set me up for my innards to be examined.

Now, there is no need for anyone to get concerned at this point in the story. And, I promise you, I really **am** going to get to the scripture for today. But I bring my personal medical things up because, while I was doing all that preparation for my test - drinking clear liquids, not eating solid foods, consuming more laxatives than I believe I ever have in my entire life - I was reminded of Martin Luther.

Because Luther, it turns out, suffered a lot from digestive difficulties. More specifically, he probably suffered from gall stones, and he dealt with constipation as well. A Lot. Yes, I know you didn't come to worship to hear me talk about constipation, but there's a point here. **Because** Luther had these difficulties, he tended to spend a lot of time sitting in a particular room, outside of the main house, and since there wasn't a whole lot to do in this particular room while attempting that particular activity that room was designed for, he apparently tended to do a lot of *studying* while in that room (and just to be perfectly clear, I **am** talking about an outhouse).

And, some scholars speculate, because of some vague references Luther himself has made, that it may well have been while studying in his outhouse that Luther came to begin to understand this whole concept of *Grace* as a *Gift* from God.

Did you catch that in the Romans passage?

*²³ since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; ²⁴ they are now justified by his **grace as a gift**, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,*

The concept of grace was one with which Luther struggled, because he lived in a time when The Church taught *works righteousness*. That's a fancy phrase that we generally don't use in our everyday language, but it means, basically, that work makes us right; *doing* will earn us the love of God. That's why the church of Luther's day stressed you **have** to go to worship; you **must** confess your sins; you **need** to receive communion. And the more you **do**, the **greater** God will love you. So, if saying prayers before you go to sleep at night is good, praying when you get up in the morning is better, and doing so again at lunch and supper is even more so. There are reports of Luther spending hours confessing every sin he could think of, because he didn't want to miss a single one. He would leave, only to come running back to the confessional having remembered something he forgot.

Do you start to see why the idea of *justified by God's grace as a gift* became so freeing to Luther?

Luther wasn't the only one having problems with The Church. Reform of the church is what *many* people wanted. Reform is part of the reasons that the Franciscans, the Dominicans, and the Augustinian orders all were formed (the Jesuits came along after the Reformation). But before Luther, there were people like John Wycliffe in England, in the 1300's, who translated scripture into English (which was against the law at the time). There was Jan Hus, from present day Czech Republic, in the early 1400's, whose primary crime was wanting to reform the church. For that, he was declared a heretic and burned at the stake.

Contemporary with Luther were folks like William Tyndale in England, who was able to not only translate scripture into English, but got it published in Europe and was able to smuggle copies back into England. John Calvin in France, whose theology of predestination formed the foundations of the modern Presbyterian church. Huldrych Zwingli, who was to 16th century Switzerland what Martin Luther was to Germany. And Menno Simmons, a Dutch reformer whose followers today bear his name, the Mennonites.

Martin Luther simply wanted some changes to the church of his day. There were practices with which he didn't agree, theology he felt was in conflict with scripture. All he wanted was for the leadership to recognize his grievances, and be open to discussion. But they weren't. They weren't, in large part, because in getting people to **do**, that brought in large amounts of cash to the church, which, in turn, most of those same leaders used, not to benefit those in need, but rather to benefit themselves. And while Luther was moved mightily by the verse:

*²⁸ For we hold that a person is justified by faith **apart from works** prescribed by the law.*

The leaders of Luther's day continued to stress **doing works**.

And, lest you think I am trying to elevate Luther to some great status, let me read you a short quote from a book I'm reading by Lutheran theologian Martin Marty:

By the way, and in passing: repentant commemorators do no one a favor by inflating Martin Luther to superhuman heroic status. He leaves plenty of evidence on thousands of pages in his own vast collection of writings that he was flawed,

limited, sinful, often wrong, in need of repentance, and one who had to experience a change of heart. Daily.

Martin E. Marty October 31 1517: Martin Luther and the Day that Changed the World, p. 17

So, back to bathrooms. First off, let me say that my colonoscopy came back normal! And I realize that the bathroom, or even more so, toilets, is not necessarily the place where we want to be thinking about our walk with the Lord.

But actually, it may *well* be the *perfect* place. Because with all that water, we can be reminded of our baptism; of promises made; of promises kept, and of promises broken. We can be reminded, every morning when we look in the mirror, as we get ready for our day, we can use that water to make the sign of the cross on our foreheads. We can use that water to remind ourselves that, like water, God is an important part of our lives, that *faith* and *grace* and *forgiveness* are important parts of our lives.

So, don't begrudge, or belittle, those common but necessary rooms that each of us has to visit throughout the day. Think of those times, not as taking you away from something more important, but as a time to reflect, to reflect on faith, to reflect on grace, and to reflect on God.

Make that ordinary time, into a time of growth. Make that everyday time, into a moment when we humble ourselves before our creator. Make that alone time, and any time, really, regardless of activity or place, make *all* time a time to remember we are saved, *not* by any works we might do, but we are saved by God's grace, alone.

Amen.

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