

“By Scripture alone! By grace alone! By faith alone! By Christ alone! To the glory of God alone!”

While many in church communities will soon gather to celebrate a “festival of reconciliation” - in which Lutherans gather with Roman Catholics or others to downplay the insurmountable differences between the church bodies – we in the AELC rightly gather to celebrate the gift of God’s Word in its truth and purity! We reminisce on those precious words, “*For we conclude that a person is justified by faith, apart from the works of the Law*” (Romans 3:28). In connection with this verse, Martin Luther wrote: “Suddenly I felt as if born anew, as if the gate to paradise had been opened.”

Rightly so, for Luther is an example of someone who had been trapped in the bitter slavery and futility of the Law. Luther had been trapped in the Roman Catholic Church, which had all but abandoned the Word of God in favour of man-made doctrines.

Luther had long seen our Lord Jesus as a harsh judge whom he needed to appease by his good works. It was by a miracle of the Holy Spirit that Luther, like us, was brought to understand and believe that salvation is by God’s grace alone and not by human works or good deeds. “*For by grace you have been saved through faith. This is not of yourselves. It is the gift of God, ⁹ not of works, that no one may boast*” (Ephesians 2:8-9). Luther then became a staunch defender of the true Christian faith based solely on the Bible.

Within our fellowship we do not gather on the festival of Reformation to celebrate a man, but rather to celebrate the gift our Lord gave back to His Church through a man - the Word of God in its truth and purity! It is grace which separates the Christian faith from all other religions in the world. All of the world’s religions are based on human merits/good works for salvation. By nature man knows only this form of religion and tries to import such thinking into the salvation picture. In no uncertain terms our Lord assures us that salvation is by God’s grace (undeserved love!) alone - it cannot be a combination of God’s grace and man’s works.

Our Lord speaks of our salvation by grace alone when He says, “*No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has comprehended what God has prepared for those who love Him*” (1 Corinthians 2:9). That is how foreign the thought of salvation by grace is to natural man!

Yet, we are freely given this grace and salvation. For by grace we have been saved (Ephesians 2:8-9). Grace shows our salvation as a gift of God alone with no merit or worthiness in ourselves. Faith is God’s gracious key by which we may access Christ’s merits that open the doors of heaven!

Now, there are a lot of different “faiths” in the world, but only one that saves - faith in Jesus Christ! The true and saving faith looks to and trusts in Jesus alone for forgiveness and salvation. “*For there is no other name under heaven that has been given among human beings by which we must be saved*” (Acts 4:12).

Faith is a precious gift - it can’t be bought, earned, or chosen; it can only be given! Only the Holy Spirit can work this miracle in our hearts, leading us to understand and believe. Only the Holy Spirit can lead us to understand and believe that “*a person is justified by faith, apart from the works of the Law*” (Romans 3:28).

God’s Word is the means through which this gift is bestowed on us. Sad to say, what Scripture teaches has become a matter of popular vote today. All around us we see the devastating effects of tampering with God’s Word. St. Paul foresaw that a time will come when people “*will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths*” (2 Timothy 4 :4).

So, while many will gather again this year for a “festival of reconciliation” and not celebrate the Reformation as a testimony to the grace of God, on our part we shall gather in our AELC churches to rejoice in our Lord’s certain mercy in restoring to us His Word in its truth and purity. As Martin Luther was God’s chosen instrument to bring about the sixteenth century Reformation, so we today are God’s chosen instruments to continue the work started so long ago. Let us therefore carry forth the battle standard of the Reformation. May our battle cry forever be: “By Scripture alone! By grace alone! By faith alone! By Christ alone! To the glory of God alone!”