

## Here I Stand

“I can do no other”

Texts: Jeremiah 31:31-34

Romans 3: 19-28 (Series C. Reformation Sunday) Ps. 46

John 8:31-36

### Prayer

The year was November 10, 1483 and the news went through the village like a wild fire in Eisleben. A son has been born to Hans and Margareta Luther. He was named Martin, he grew up in a strict and disciplinary home. He was short but muscular and grew up with this awesome fear of God. Luther's concept of God ..... was, this God who sits up there and ever ready to punish those who break his laws.

Then came the life changing experience of this young man. It was July 2, 1505 and young Luther was trudging over a parched lonely road on the out skirt of Saxon village of Stotternheim.

Suddenly there was a heavy down pour, a bolt of lightning rifts the sky and knock this young Luther to the ground. Struggling to rise, he cried out in terror “*St. Anne, St. Anne please help me! And I will be monk.*”

This man who thus called upon a saint was later to repudiate the saints. He who vowed to become a monk was later to renounce monastic life. A loyal son of the Roman Catholic Church, was later to shatter the structure of medieval church. A devoted servant of the Pope, he later to identify the Pope with antichrist. This is Martin Luther the Reformer.

Luther joined the Augustinian Order, but his quest for pleasing this angry God did not end, but rather intensified. Luther tormented over the idea, “*how can a sinful human being please a Holy God?*”

In November 1510 Martin Luther journeyed to Rome and during his vigorous prayer time climbing the stairs of St. Peter's Cathedral, and God finally spoke to Martin Luther in his heart that: “*the just shall live by faith alone.*” Martin Luther was reborn in the Spirit of God.

Luther discovered the difference between *an angry God* and the God who is *kind, loving, self -sustaining, merciful, and forgiven*. Today, we are daughters, and sons of the Reformation, at least in terms of our heritage.

This also calls us, examine if we are sons and daughters of the Reformation in our beliefs and in practice. It is imperative we examine what God has done in ages past in the light of his *Holy Word*, and then ask ourselves. Are we being true to these principles?

Reformation Day is designed to revive within us an appreciation not only for what God has done in the past, but also to examine what he is doing with us today, with our families, with our congregation in the past, as well as to examine what we doing with this great Reformation Truth. I believe God is changing us each day from glory to glory. We are not where we were ten or twenty years ago, last week.

Today we celebrate one of the most if not the most significant event in church history *Reformation*. It never was Martin Luther's intention to break away from the mother church, but to draw its attention to the false teaching, corruption that had crept into the church's teaching and practice. Now after 500 years, we are beginning to understand the one doctrine that was at the *centre* of the Reformation.

The understanding of the doctrine of *justification* was at the heart of the separation between the two churches. The Lutheran Church has always stated that the teaching about *justification* is the most important teaching of the Christian Church, "the article upon which the church *stands* or *falls*". But what is the teaching about justification?

The word "*justify*" means "*to declare righteous*". The term comes from the courtroom of the first century. As a trial drew to a close, the judge, having heard all the evidence, would pronounce his verdict.

If the accused person is found guilty, then he / she must suffer the punishment for the crime. If the verdict was one of "*not guilty*" the accused person was "*justified*".

The accusation no longer had any power, and he or she was free to go. God declares us *"not guilty"* of sin and *"straight"* instead of *"crooked"* in his eyes. It is a free and gracious act of God, performed by God on the basis of Jesus' death on the cross, and received by us through faith in Christ.

Nothing we do, and nothing we ever could do contributes to our own *justification*, or *salvation* in Christ. It is entirely an act of God on our behalf. The *crooked* are declared to be *straight*, and *guilty* is now declared *righteous* in God's eyes.

St Paul sums up this so neatly and precisely in Ephesians, *"For it is by God's grace that you have been saved through faith. It is not the result of your own efforts, but God's gift, so that no one can boast about it"* (Eph 2:8,9). Our salvation is a gift from God the apostle says.

It is a gift that comes to us without any cost to us, it is free, it comes with no strings attached. It's a gift that comes from a loving God who wants everyone to be saved and to have forgiveness and eternal life. Our text says, *"by the free gift of God's grace all are put right with him through Christ Jesus"*.

You see, what's so amazing about this free gift of eternal life is that we are totally unworthy of a gift like this. When we talk about giving gifts, we usually mean giving a birthday gift to someone we love, giving a thank you gift to someone who has done something special for us, giving a wedding gift because we have been invited to the wedding celebration. We give a gift because we believe that the receiver is worthy of our gift.

Seldom, if ever, would we give a gift to someone we don't like, someone who annoys us or hurts us. We would never think of giving an expensive gift to someone who is completely undeserving of a gift, not just any gift but the best gift that money could buy.

But that's what God does. He gives us the most precious gift of all – his Son Jesus. Through his death and resurrection we are declared *"not guilty"*.

Why is *justification* so important? We *all* came into this world with something called deposition to sin or the bondage to sin. We sin, because we are sinners simple as that, it is an inherited condition.

We recognize sin in our world and in ourselves because we can see how our sin affects our *relationships* with others, how sin has *destroyed* so much of God's creation, how sin is evident in war, crime, death of children through hunger, and we could go on. Sin is the symptoms of the deep rift between God and us.

Even though we live in an age that concentrates on the technological achievements, medical advances, scientific accomplishments of human race. But the fact remains, our deposition, that inner reality, separates us from God, and while we remain separate from God we face a bleak future. We are unable to justify ourselves before God (make straight what is crooked), we need God's help.

In fact, we need God's help every day because every day we do wrong and everyday we need God's forgiveness. Martin Luther who never got tired of saying that before God we are beggars – completely empty of any *goodness* and solely dependent on God's grace for our salvation.

Dr Karl Barth is a renowned theologian was asked, "If you had the chance what would you say to Adolf Hitler?" The old professor said, "*Jesus Christ died for his sins.*" What could be more profound than these?

"*Jesus loves me*" "*Jesus died for me*" – simple yet deep. There is no limit to God's grace. He keeps on loving us even when we go our own way. He keeps on loving us when we fall into the darkest of sin.

He even keeps on loving us when our love for him has grown cold and our faith in him barely exists. *Jesus loves me this I know*. He is my Saviour. He died on the cross for me. With faith in Jesus I can say, "I am forgiven". God *is* "the God of all grace." Daily God justifies me, he makes *straight* what once was *crooked*, he declares me innocent, forgiven, saved.

All charges against me and you have been dropped. We have been acquitted even though we don't deserve God's unmerited favour (grace). It comes to this finally. Because of God's grace, there is nothing we can do to make God love me less.

This is what grace is all about. To love somebody when he /she does not deserve to be loved. That's the kind of God we have. One who loves us. One who freely forgives and makes us right with him through his Son Jesus.

This is the fundamental doctrine of the church at the centre of the Reformation. Today it is this doctrine that brings Lutherans, Anglicans, Catholics, and other Christian denominations together to celebrate this amazing grace of God working in our churches and in the lives of his people.

The year was 826 AD when a young French monk took a stand against all odds to be missionary in the most hostile environment in his time. His vision was to spread God's message of love and grace to the Vikings.

He died in 865 AD at the age of 64 yrs. with very little success. Hundreds of years later, today Denmark, and the rest of the Scandinavia communities enjoy the fruit of his work, as Christian countries.

This French monk is no other than St. Ansgar. The patron Saint of Denmark, Germany, and Iceland. Our congregation is named after him. (*St. Ansgar was born 801 and died 865*).

The year was April 26, 1521 Martin Luther took a bold stand before early kings and rulers, he refused to recant or compromise, for his conscience was captive to God's Word. Here I stand.....*I can do no other*.

On Aug. 28, 1963, the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his "*I Have a Dream*" speech from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. Concluded with his famous "*Free at last, Free at last, Thank God almighty we are free at last.*" Martin Luther King Jr.

For me the light came on July of 1970 when I personally embraced Jesus Christ, as my Lord and Saviour. May Holy Spirit that guarded the Prophets, Disciples and Reformers throughout the ages guide each and every one of us to stay faithful to God and his word. And take a stand as his faithful servants in good time and bad.

We thank God for this unique celebration in the history of the church. Today, I hope we too would leave this place of worship with the assurance that Jesus loves us, we have been set free .....*this we know for the Bible tells us so.*

We go forth in the spirit of the Reformation and love the world God created. Wherever we are, let us come together. My friend *“if you do something out of pain, you will not enjoy it”* Take a towel and a basin, and discover what it means to be truly, truly, truly a servant of God.

*We thank God for his grace. We thank God for being our refuge.*

**Amen.**