

**Free At Last: By Grace Alone, Faith Alone**  
**Scripture Alone**

Texts: Jeremiah 31:31-34

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

Gospel of John 8:31-36

Let us Pray:

Today, as Lutheran Christians, we, along with thousands of other churches around the world in the Protestant tradition are celebrating *Reformation Sunday*. A day where we celebrate the work of the Protestant reformers of the 1500's who realized that the church had strayed from the Gospel and had begun abusing it's power to control and exploit the faithful.

This Sunday is special, it is historic because it marks 506 years (October 31<sup>st</sup> 1517). As Martin Luther, nailed what have become known as the 95 Theses to the door of the old church in Wittenberg, Germany.

Luther's theses were 95 points of protest against the official teaching and practice of the Church in Germany of his day, highlighting where they had strayed from the way of Jesus and outlining how they, according to Luther, could return to the fullness of the Gospel.

The nailing of the 95 theses to the Wittenberg door is known as the unofficial start of the Protestant Reformation. Since those days, a movement of reformation was started that has never ceased.

A tradition of questioning tradition and of examining the teaching of the Scriptures for oneself emerged as *new* form of Christianity, distinct from the Catholic and Orthodox traditions that had dominated the religion for nearly 1500 years.

Visionary pastors and leaders like Martin Luther, John Calvin and many others were guided by the conviction of the Holy Spirit that the church of their day had drifted away from the essential, original teachings of Christianity, especially in regard to what it was teaching about salvation—how people can be forgiven of sin through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and receive eternal life with God.

The Reformation sought to re-orient Christianity on the original message of Jesus Christ. A movement that transformed Christianity and eventually led to the formation of the Protestant denominations that exist today. I will try this morning the message that these men and women proclaimed as they were moved by the Spirit.

The **Five Solas** are five Latin phrases (*or slogans*) that emerged during the Reformation to summarize the Reformers' theological convictions about the essentials / the fundamentals of Christianity.

**The Five Solas are:**

1. **Sola Scriptura** ("Scripture alone"): The Bible alone is our highest authority.
2. **Sola Fide** ("faith alone"): We are saved through faith alone in Jesus Christ.
3. **Sola Gratia** ("grace alone"): We are saved by the grace of God alone.
4. **Solus Christus** ("Christ alone"): Jesus Christ alone is our Lord, Savior, and King.
5. **Soli Deo Gloria** ("to the glory of God alone"): We live for the glory of God alone.

Let's have a brief look at each of these five points.

## **SOLA SCRIPTURA**

The Scriptures are our ultimate and trustworthy authority for faith and practice. This doesn't mean that the Bible is the only place where truth is found, but it does mean that everything else we learn about God and his world, and all other authorities, should be interpreted in light of Scripture.

The Bible gives us everything we need for our theology and our salvation. Everyone has a scripture, I mean everyone has a scripture.... yours may be something you regard as a sole authority in your life, it could be Dr. Phil, Oprah Winfred, and many others).

In discussion with a young woman some time ago about Christianity, she belittle the Bible as an outdated book, irrelevant for today..... Then I asked what is your sole authority in your life? Without missing a beat, she said... Me, pointing to herself! *How is that working for you?* I asked. We all *gotta serve somebody*.....

Bob Dylan said it well in his song “Gotta Serve Somebody”

**You're gonna have to serve somebody, yes indeed  
You're gonna have to serve somebody,  
Well, it may be the devil or it may be the Lord  
But you're gonna have to serve somebody.**

Every word of the 66 books of the Bible is inspired by God’s Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit also helps us to understand and obey Scripture. The Bible is about Jesus Christ and his role as God and Savior (*2 Peter 2:20*)

### **SOLA FIDE AND SOLA GRATIA**

We are saved solely through faith in Jesus Christ because of God’s grace and Christ’s merit alone. We are not saved by our merits or declared righteous by our good works. God grants salvation not because of the good things we do, and despite our sin.

As humans, we inherited a nature that is enslaved to sin. Because of our nature, we are naturally enemies of God and lovers of evil. We need to be made alive (*regenerated, be born again*) so that we can even have faith in Christ. God graciously chooses to give us new hearts so that we trust in Christ and are saved through faith alone.

Even when we are faithless toward him, God is still faithful. We can only stand before God by his grace as he mercifully attributes to us the righteousness of Jesus Christ and attributes to him the consequences of our sins.

Several years ago, I had an interaction with a Mormon missionary regarding salvation by grace alone, and faith alone: I was taken back by his reaction, he was enraged by my statement and said this is too cheap and simple:

Friends in Christ Salvation is *not* cheap, if costs God his only begotten son. That Jesus’ life of perfect righteousness is counted as ours, and our records of sin and failure were counted to Jesus when he died on the cross. *Sola fide* and *sola gratia* expressed in *Ephesians 2:8*

“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. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”

## **SOLUS CHRISTUS**

God has given the ultimate revelation of himself to us by sending Jesus Christ, *Colossians 1:15*. Only through God’s gracious self-revelation in Jesus do we come to a saving and transforming knowledge of God. *1 Timothy 1:5*.

Because God is holy and we by nature sinful, *1 John 1:1 Hebrews 7:25 Romans 8:34*. Neither religious rituals nor good works mediate between us and God. There is no other name on earth by which a person can be saved other than the name of Jesus (*Acts 4:12*), and his sacrificial death alone can atone for sin. *Hebrews 7:23*

## **SOLI DEO GLORIA**

Glory belongs to God alone. God’s glory is the central motivation for salvation, not improving the lives of people—though that is a wonderful by product. God is not a means to an end—God is the means and the end.

The goal of all of life is to give glory to God alone: “Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (*1 Corinthians 10:31*). As the Westminster Catechism says, the chief purpose of human life is “*to glorify God and enjoy him forever.*”

We are followers of Christ, the great reformer. We are here this morning, we find ourselves in the Protestant tradition, one that values above all else the ability to critique and progress beyond staleness and corruption in the Church. We of all people are people of reformation.

This new reformation that I am convinced that God is up to is one of the Spirit. It's a reformation that begins with each and every one of us stopping and listening to that still *small voice within* that is calling us, like Peter, to move forward into a fuller expression of the Kingdom of God.

This morning, it is my hope that we would heed the call to reform. It is so easy to sit here and listen to me speak about this, its easy to say "Amen, brother", and its easy to have in mind *another* group of people that you think might need to reform. But this word isn't for another group. It's for us. It's for you.

Each of us need to reform our lives. We need to reform our churches. We need to reform our communities. And it's not the job of religious leaders, or politicians, or activists to lead this theological, philosophical, social, and political renewal.

The Spirit's call is to you. To me. To be agents of reformation, of expansion, of inclusion, and redemption. We are called to wake up each and every day and look out at our world and ask, "*Where is the Spirit leading me today to bring about reformation and renewal?*" The task is ours, dear family.

We are all the great reformers. We are all, together, the hope of the world. What will you do today to help reform our waywardness and bring about salvation to our world?

The Spirit *is, in fact*, speaking to each one of us. The question is will we, like Peter and Paul, Martin Luther and, John Calvin, George Müller, and Mother Teresa, David Livington and Martin Luther King Jr. and all of the other reformers that have gone before us, have the ears to hear and the eyes to see where God is calling us to go?

May we always be reformed and always keep reforming, for the sake of the Gospel, for the sake of each other, and for the sake of our world. ***Amen.***

October 29, 2023