

Jesus Alone

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Our Savior's Way Lutheran Church

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We are celebrating Reformation Day today, and you can see lots and lots of red. Does anybody know why we have red all over the place? What is red symbolized in the scriptures that you have learned? The Holy Spirit. You can see on the back wall, there is a banner with a dove as well. Over here in our stained glass, you can see the Spirit right there as well. The red is a symbol of the Holy Spirit because the Holy Spirit came down upon His people, God's people, with tongues of fire, flame, red "Red".

Now many of you wore red today. Did you know that is why you were wearing red, or did you just do it because we asked you to wear red? Is that because you are good listeners? And it is good. You listen to the church. It is a good thing. In Martin Luther's day, there were some difficulties with that.

The Reformation came about in 1517 when Martin Luther tagged up a whole bunch of requests on a church door, all about how we, together as the community of Christ, can help people focus on the true center of our faith. So, we are going to talk about these three *solas*, these *alones*, that are the outcome of the resurrection, and what they mean to us, and how they make sense *Scripture alone*, *Faith alone*, and *Grace alone*.

And in order to do that, I want you to do something special today. We are going to pick up the Bible. All right, maybe you brought your own Bible. That is great, too. But pull out the Bible. We are going to go to Acts chapter 4 and we are going to look at our second reading today in a little more detail. Through it, you are going to see how these three ideas, scripture alone, faith alone, grace alone, not only encapsulate kind of what this scripture is talking about, but what our whole life as a Christian is truly about.

Let us go to this first one. We are going to start in chapter four, the first four verses:

And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand.

The first thing that the Reformers did was to put the focus of our lives back on scripture. At the time it was tempting to listen to simply tradition and get everything that we knew and loved from tradition. Like, “Why do we wear red? Well, because that is the way we have always done it before.” Not a sufficient answer. Why do we do this? Where does it come from scripture? What does it symbolize? How does it help encourage our faith? How does it speak who Jesus is to the people around us? Those are all the questions that Martin Luther came back to, and it was not just him, there were many others along with him, who allowed us to look back into scripture for ourselves, to see what God was saying.

And this was a unique time in history, too, with the invention of the printing press, and a whole bunch of new biblical texts being discovered from the east, being brought back to Europe, where they were able to actually have a scripture like this that they could put in their hands. Previously, people like you and me were not allowed to have this. We did not have this full scripture that we could just take out in our homes and read anytime we wanted. Did not exist. It was not allowed.

This great truth of the Reformation is that in Scripture, we find out who God is. We trust in Him, who He says that He is, and we are privileged to be able to hold one of these and to read it, and understand it as well, at least start an understanding, and we grow in understanding over time. We are privileged to be able to translate this into all the languages that exist on this earth. So that everybody can read what’s in here, and discover that

when we focus on scripture alone, we see that God comes to us, and speaks to us, from the very beginning to the very end, about how much He loves us, about who Jesus is, how He was promised to come to save the world, how He did come, how He died on the cross, how He did raise, be raised from the dead, and how He is coming again to make all things new. This is scripture. In the disciples' day, the scripture that they had was only the Old Testament. And they knew it. And as they were proclaiming Jesus in the area, they knew that all throughout the Old Testament, the Messiah, the one who was going to come to save the world, is all over the place. It was there.

The Sadducees had their own ideas. They did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. They looked at the Old Testament and said, "Well, there are these pieces in here about everybody being raised at the end of time. We are just going to put those aside for now because we really do not agree with that. We do not understand it. It does not make sense to us. So, we are just going to cut out that part of Scripture and just take the parts that we like." This idea in the Reformation of going to Scripture alone does not allow us to do that. We have to take God's Word for what it is. We have to go to all of Scripture and try to understand it.

We use those who have come before us, their knowledge, their understanding, and even the traditions to help us understand. But in the end, it is Scripture alone that we go to, to understand who God is, to understand who He is, in which, in whom we can trust. This, this is where we go.

So, what happens in our text when people hear the word? When they hear that Jesus was the Messiah who was promised, He's now come, He has been raised from the dead, we have seen Him, and He promises you that you can have that too. What happened? People believed. People believed, and they came to faith. They believed in Jesus. The scripture testifies about Jesus. It is all about Him.

The next section, starting in verse five, reads:

On the next day their rulers and elders and scribes gathered together in Jerusalem, with Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, “By what power or by what name did you do this?” Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers of the people and elders, if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well. (vv. 5-10)

The next thing we learn from the Reformation is that we trust in faith alone. This answers the question for us, “In whom do we trust? Who are we going to trust to bring us back to God? In whose name does there exist power to heal those who are crippled? In whose name does it exist the power to set us free?” We heard in our Gospel reading how Jesus said, “if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8:36). It is Jesus only. He is the one who brings true freedom. Over the last few weeks, we have been talking through our last series about *As We Are*, understanding that *the things that we hope for* and *the things that we wish to be about ourselves in the world* do not actually bring us the freedom that we want so deeply. It is Jesus alone that brings that freedom. What the disciples are pointing the people to see is that it is through Jesus and His power that reconnects us with the Lord.

Back in the Reformers’ days, it was not all about faith. It was about trusting in what we could do to work alongside our faith to help us reconnect with God. Have you ever thought sometimes, maybe if I just do more good than bad, I will get to enjoy the heavenly realms with the Lord? Or maybe just a little bit more good than bad? That is not really how it works. When we go back to Scripture, we see that it is in the name of Jesus alone that there is salvation.

The Reformers were able to point us back to this to say, “We think that we can be free by helping ourselves. But in reality, we cannot. We are not perfect people. We cannot live up to the law that God says. We just cannot. But it is okay. Because Jesus did.” When we go back to Scripture, we see what Jesus actually did. That He lived a perfect life in our place. He did all the things that we could not. And then when He went to the cross, He did not take His sins, He took ours. He paid for them out of great love. And He saves us. It is through faith, this trust that does not come through our human understanding, but this trust that is gifted to us by the Holy Spirit that brings us this faith. The disciples are proclaiming this to the people, saying, Look back to Jesus. Look back to Him. He’s the one in whom your faith can be placed.

The third thing that we learn from the Reformers is all about grace. Starting in verse 11:

This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus. But seeing the man who was healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition. (vv. 11-14)

When Peter and John come to them and say, “There is no other name in which there is salvation,” they are speaking this truth of grace. When Martin Luther went out into the towns and saw people oppressed by the weight of their works—by the weight of the admonition that if *you just pay this amount of money*, if *you just do this amount of things*, if *you just trust harder*, if *you were just more faithful*, then *God will love you*—he said, that is not Scripture. That is not here. Instead, Jesus says, “I come to you freely. Through what I have done, I have saved you. Through what I have done, I forgive you. In all the ways you have fallen short, my forgiveness for you is there.” Just like the prodigal son who returns, so the

Father is waiting for you, with open arms to return to be loved. Every time we ask for forgiveness, Jesus forgives us.

This is grace. How do we go about living this life? How do we go about trusting in God? It is by grace alone. It is not by our own actions. It is not by our own knowledge. It is truly by simply trusting that the grace of God is enough for us. What Jesus has done for us, in dying and rising again, brings us back to God fully, completely, without our help. And instead, calls us to live in this world by the power of his Holy Spirit.

It seemed like all the Sadducees and the Pharisees were making fun of the disciples *when they saw that Peter and John were uneducated common men*. I do not want to be perceived as an uneducated common man. Nobody does. It feels like a put-down. But do you see what happened next? *They recognized that Peter and John had been with Jesus*. It was through their presence with Him, through their proclamation of Scripture and the Word, through their proclamation of pointing everybody back to Jesus and the new life that is found in Him, that they ceased to see Peter and John, and instead, they saw Jesus. That is the work of our lives today as we go out into our world, into our families. It is not so that people will see us. They are not supposed to see us. They are supposed to see Jesus. Through what we say, through what we do, through what the Holy Spirit leads us to do in this world, He allows more and more people to see that Jesus is the one who brings hope. Jesus is the one who brings life. Jesus is the one who brings salvation.

It is through these three teachings of the Reformation that we see that even at the heart of Martin Luther's rose emblem is the cross. Everything begins and ends with Jesus. How do we learn about Jesus? It is through *scripture alone*. How do we trust in Jesus? It is through *the faith that God gives us through His Spirit alone*. How do we understand our salvation? It is through *grace—it is a gift—alone*. All of this through Jesus.

I hope that as we think about the Reformation, what happened 500 years ago, we see that this truly is a gift, that we are able to open the scriptures for ourselves to see and understand who Jesus is, that we are able to go

out into this world knowing that the Holy Spirit is with us, that God's promise to us is good and true, that as we show people great love and grace, forgiveness, hope, that they might see Jesus and not us, so that, by the power of His name, they too will believe that they have life.

Would you close in prayer with me? *Heavenly Father, we thank you for bringing us here today, for opening our hearts and minds to your scriptures so that we would learn and see that the way that you have called your people from the very beginning is through your Spirit. We give you thanks for those who have reformed our ideas and our church, who have allowed us to focus on you more clearly and more deeply. We pray, Lord, that as we go from this place into our families, neighborhoods, work, and school, you would allow us to speak your love and your grace to those around us. Allow us to forgive those who need to be forgiven. Allow us to ask for forgiveness when we need to. So that, Lord, your grace will be seen and that people would see and trust in you above all else. All this we pray in Jesus' name, Amen.*