

“Scripture Alone.” Remembering the Reformation.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ! Amen.

In a few days we will celebrate the 501st anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation. I thought that we can begin our reflections on this event already today, and then continue to do that on Wednesday as we gather for the Reformation Day's service.

Historians and theologians have prepared a very brief summary about the Reformation. They have actually managed to compress it to just eight words, or we can say – four phrases. Do you know what they are?

Scripture alone, grace alone, Christ alone, and faith alone. That's it. It pretty much sums up the Lutheran Reformation. But what does this mean? I propose that today we look at the first of these four phrases. Scripture alone.

I hope you know what the Book of Concord is ... it is the summary of how we as Lutheran Christians understand the life-giving message of the Scriptures. We can say that this understanding makes us Lutherans and equips us to share the Gospel message clearly and powerfully.

And in the Book of Concord it is written, that “we receive and embrace with our whole heart the Prophetic and Apostolic Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the pure, clear fountain of Israel, which is the only true standard by which all teachers and doctrines are to be judged.”

Sounds familiar? It should. Because inspired by this confession also we in the Lutheran Church of Australia have made a similar confession of faith. It is in our Church's constitution, and in the constitution of our congregation.

It sounds like this. We accept “without reservation the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as a whole and in all their parts, as the divinely inspired, written and inerrant Word of God, and as the only infallible source and norm for all matters of faith, doctrine and life.”

This is what we all have promised to uphold. It may sound a bit technical, a bit formal, so we may wonder what does this mean practically? Why would we think so highly and even bind our entire lives to some ancient book?

Look at this book! Does it look in any way special? Does it look at all different from any other book? Not much. You see, this external similarity hinders us from perceiving and fully appreciating what priceless treasure is given to us.

Everything has a beginning. Our Universe had a beginning. And the most exciting question any human being can ask is: “Where did all this come from? Who created everything that there is, things visible and invisible?”

Who stands behind this waste Universe, and this abundant richness of life on our planet Earth? Who is this person? We are only little specks in this Universe, and there is no way we can find the answer to this question on our own.

But... fortunately for us, this person desires to be known. We have God who speaks. God of conversation. God who does everything by speaking. By speaking He created everything that exists, and still holds it together.

By His speaking He reveals Himself to us and by speaking He calls us into fellowship with Him. And what is important for our today's reflections, – He has arranged that His words are actually written down and available for us.

It means we can know Him, God the Creator, the One who is also our Creator, we can get to know Him by listening to His words, right here. This is such a unique book. It is so unique, because of its unique authorship.

It is so unique because it tells us the truth from God's own perspective. It is so unique, because it has very unique purposes. Let's just reflect on these three for a while. Unique authorship, unique perspective, and unique purposes.

Unique authors. The history of the Bible is amazing. It is not just a book, it is like a little library. It consists of 66 books written between 15th century BC and the 1st century AD in places like Palestine, Greece, Babylon, Rome, Persia, but all of these books together speak the same clear and consistent message.

We know many of the human authors, but not all of them. However, we also know that what they wrote, was never “produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” (2Pet 1:21)

Yes, this book is written by men just like us. But, it is also written by the Triune God Himself. That is Him, who spoke through these men, that's Him who publicly confirmed that they are His messengers, and that's Him who helped to preserve His words so that we can hear them even today.

A few examples. Moses wrote the first five books of the Old Testament. How did it begin? This is what God Yahweh said to Him at the Mount Sinai:

“Behold, I am coming to you in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you and may also believe you forever.” (Exo 19:9)

Later He commanded Moses to write down His message, and people believed Moses ... and from there on they carefully copied and preserved his writings. And we can still read them now. Three and half millennia later!

The same principle we see throughout the Bible. God Himself chooses and calls His messengers, by mighty signs He confirms that they are His messengers and their writings then are preserved for the next generations. For us as well.

Or listen to this. This is one of my favorites. This is John, the beloved disciple of Jesus. “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our

hands, concerning the word of life – the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us – that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us.” (1Jo 1:1-3)

Think about this, in this book we have eye-witnesses’ testimonies from people, with whom God spoke directly, from people, who were together with Jesus, who saw Him, heard Him, touched Him... And our gracious God has preserved these testimonies, so that you can listen to Him speaking to you through the writings of His faithful servants. Isn’t that wonderful!

Okay, what was the second unique thing? A unique perspective. If only we could understand it and accept it with our whole hearts... Here, the Triune God Himself reveals us the truth. He reveals that He is our Creator.

He reveals that He has created each one of us in our mothers’ womb in His Image and likeness, as infinitely precious for Him. That He has created us not only for the life in this age, but also for the life in the age to come.

He reveals what our root problem is. Our rebellion against Him has brought sin and death into this world. That explains our sufferings and pains in this world. However, He also reveals that He will not abandon us in this broken world.

Instead, that God Himself, the Son of God, has come to rescue us from the bondage to sin and death and devil, and to give us freedom to live again in loving relationships with our Father in Heaven.

He reveals, that this age will pass, and that He will bring forth full restoration of His good creation, where there will be no more sin, nor pain, nor crying, for our God Himself will dwell with us and we will see Him as He is.

This is the uniquely beautiful message, and it encompassed the whole history of the humanity, from the creation of the heavens and the earth till the creation of the New Heavens and the New Earth, your true and eternal home.

Thus, the Triune God reveals what kind of God He is, “God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty...” (Exo 34:6-7)

And He reveals what His attitude towards you is. “For God so loved the world, that He gave his only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16) This much about God’s own perspective.

Finally, the third uniqueness. What was it? Unique purposes. What are they? For one: “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” (2Ti 3:15-17)

Or we can say that the Scripture reveals us God's wisdom and God's design for our lives. Who we are created to be in all our calling and how to lead this life so that we can be a blessing to others and pleasing to our Lord.

And we have this wealth of God's wisdom right here, available to everyone. All of this we have right here. Come and drink you all who are thirsty! However, there is one more purpose, which probably sums up the best why our God has given us His written Word.

These are the words of the Holy Spirit recorded by John. "But these [things] are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name." (John 20:31)

This is a music to our ears. The Triune God has spoken through His chosen messengers, have written His message down and preserved so that you! may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you! may have life in His name. This is the purpose of the Bible.

To reveal to all nations, and all people in our lives, that Jesus is the Son of God, so that they may believe and have eternal life. Now these life-creating words are entrusted to us. To hand them over to the next generation of God's people.

I hope that this brief excursus helps us once more to appreciate why we believe, teach and confess that the Scriptures alone is the only infallible source and norm for all matters of faith, doctrine and life.

For the Triune God Himself speaks to us in His word in the power of the Holy Spirit, He leads us to repentance and enables us to believe in the Gospel, and He Himself reveals His good design for our lives and enables us to live so.

Scriptures alone. Not our ideas. Not human wisdom. Not other authorities, neither in the Church, nor in the world. Not our emotions, nor mystical experiences. But the Scriptures alone. The Word of God alone is where we look for guidelines and where we put our trust.

We are so blessed to have it. To still have it. Even as it becomes harder and harder to live by it. I pray that the Triune God who speaks to us in the Scriptures, help us that we may not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred, and gladly hear and learn it. Amen.