

“3 Alones = Grace + Christ + Faith.” Rom 3:19-28

“Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.”

Blessed Reformation Day, Brothers and Sisters!

What was the Lutheran Reformation about? Why do we still today remember and celebrate those five centuries old events? Perhaps, because they transformed not only the Church but entire society?

Perhaps, because those events changed the course of the history of the entire world? Perhaps, because there were so many awe-inspiring stories of Christian courage and self-sacrificial lives? That is all true.

However, all the above are simply effects or fruits of something much more profound. The Holy Spirit drove Dr Martin Luther to search Scriptures, and in His diligent and often desperate quest for the truth He rediscovered something that was almost lost under the thick layers of human traditions and church politics...

The Gospel, the life-giving message from the Triune God. It was the power of the Gospel proclaimed that led to all the tectonic shifts in the Church and in the society. [No wonder many of Dr Luther’s contemporaries believed that he was the angel described in Revelation 14, in our today’s reading.]

This Gospel message is captured in words of Paul which we heard today: “[We] are justified by His **grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by His blood, to be received by faith.**” It is often summarized as three “alones” - **grace alone, Christ alone and faith alone.**

These three "alones" are what I invite you to reflect on today. **First, grace alone.** What is this about? It is about us and God’s attitude towards us. Do you remember what the foundational document for the Lutheran Church is?

The Augsburg Confession. It summarizes what Lutherans believe. The 1st article confesses what we believe about the Triune God. Who knows what the second article is about? About sin, that’s right. Why would someone put the article on sin

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as the second among twenty-eight articles? Because it is so crucially important. Unless we understand our situation before God, how God sees us, we will never be able to appreciate His grace or see the need for Jesus Christ. What is our situation?

As Paul the apostle puts it: **“None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.”** (Rom 3:10-12) That’s us.

This is how our Book of Concord puts it: **“[Our] sin is so deep [and horrible] a corruption of [our] nature that no reason can understand it, but it must be [learned and] believed from the revelation of Scriptures.”**

Not the most attractive picture. No one is righteous, no one does good, no one seeks God... But it is about us. About me. About you. This is our state unless God in His grace gives us new birth through the water and the Spirit.

This is not how I would like to think of myself. I believe this is not how you would like to think of yourself. But this is what the Word of God reveals. We look at one another and we seem to be decent people. Most of the time anyway.

But remember, God doesn’t look at our appearances. He sees our hearts. He sees our desires and passions and secret thoughts. All of them. Our lifetime all at once. It cannot possibly be, it isn’t a nice picture.

Once we recognize how God sees us, we begin to realize what God’s attitude towards us is. It is pure grace. **Grace alone** moves Him to come to us, to call us, to rescue us. For there is nothing good in us that would compel Him to do it.

When we find someone likable, we may love them. It is different with our Father. He doesn’t look for good and likable people. For there is none. Instead, He comes to us as we are, and then He transforms us, He gives us a new birth.

He creates in us new hearts. He makes us good, pleasing and lovable. And why does He do this? Because of His **grace alone**. This is wonderful news for us. For everyone. It means that we all are equal before our Lord. There is nothing anyone can boast about before God, nothing anyone can demand from Him.

It doesn’t matter whether you have been a faithful Christian since your birth or whether you - like the famous thief on the cross - have just received God’s forgiveness on your deathbed. Both are saved by **grace alone**.

Does it feel fair? If it doesn’t, then we haven’t understood our sin and God’s undeserved grace. Then we still think that God needs to accept us because of our goodness and, perhaps, reject others because they are not as good as us.

Then we need to seriously reconsider what we believe in the light of God’s Word, repent and seek forgiveness because of our arrogance. We all, the best of us and the worst of us, are saved by God’s undeserved **grace alone**. What a joy for those who are not perfect! What a comfort for those who have messed up their lives and done what is wrong!

The Triune God saves us not based on our merit, but because of His **grace alone**. It means that He offers His salvation to everyone, whoever you are and whatever you have done. No entry requirements. Rejoice, for this is the Good News!

What was the second “alone”? Christ alone. Fine, God loves us, calls us, accepts us by His grace alone. But how does He do that? How can we have access to His grace? The answer is – through **Christ alone**.

There is no other way to God the Father, no other way given to humanity back to their Creator, but only through Jesus Christ. You may have heard complaints: “O, this is so narrow!” When, in fact, this is the most inclusive message ever.

How so? Some may say that one should be able to choose their own way to God. Some believe that all religions would ultimately lead to the same destination. Some believe that they can have access to God wherever they choose, be it in nature, or may be looking deep into their own hearts, or wherever else.

The Scriptures say that we have access to God in **Christ alone**. How could this be inclusive? It is very simple. In all religions and belief systems there is something that you must do to obtain... whatever you want to obtain, salvation or paradise, etc. And only if you succeed, only then can you hope to get your reward.

The question then is – who is responsible for your salvation? The answer is clear. It is you! Yes! The choice between **Christ alone** and other belief systems is not about choosing between Jesus Christ and that other deity, or that prophet, or that religious teacher... it is always either Christ, or it is you.

That is the choice. Either you follow whatever rules and principles you are told to follow, and then hope that you may have done enough, or we accept God’s gift in Jesus Christ, where He says: “**It is finished.**”

Everything needed for your salvation is done. Jesus has done it. What about you? Just receive eternal life with the Triune God in the New Heavens and the New Earth as God’s gift. As an undeserved and incomprehensible in its divine magnitude gift of your loving Father in heaven. This is what we call true inclusivity. **Christ alone**.

In **Christ alone** every single person has equal chances to receive eternal life as God’s gift. Not only those who are considered good in this world, but every single person, whatever lowly, whatever imperfect you may seem in your own eyes or the eyes of this world. In Jesus **Christ alone** you are welcomed into God’s own family.

It is the Father’s gift to you. Gracious gift. Undeserved gift. Unconditional gift. You just need to... there is this one thing you need to do... To receive this gift. That’s all. But how do we receive this most precious gift of eternal life with the Son of God?

And here we come to our last “alone” – we receive it by **faith alone**. But what does this mean? This is where even some, who call themselves Christians, get it wrong. We misunderstand what this faith is. We may think that this is about knowing that there was such a person as Jesus Christ. “O, yes, I believe that there once lived a

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man from Nazareth, called Jesus.” Not enough! Nor is this about *my* faith. So many say: “I have *my* faith.” Meaning, that they believe in something. Everyone believes in something. Not enough! For the knowledge of God is built into us. We can’t erase it. But this is not the faith we are talking about.

We are talking about the faith where we fear and love and trust in the Triune God the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit above all things. And this faith is not something that we do. This faith is God’s gift to us.

This faith is the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. When we hear what the Father and the Son have done for us, the Gospel changes us, the Holy Spirit creates in us these deep longings to be loved and embraced by the holy God.

When the Holy Spirit creates this faith, then we fear to disappoint our God, as children fear to disappoint their loving parents. Then we love this God, and we want to keep His Commandments and to do everything to please Him, in response to everything He has done and does for us.

Then we trust this God, that whatever happens, He will always be with us, will always protect us, will always care for us, and nothing, nothing in the entire creation will be able to separate us from this God. For this is true.

The Holy Spirit then leads us to Jesus. We want to hear about Him more, we want to know everything about Him, we want to be with Him, where He invites us, in the Divine Service and in Bible Studies, we want to hear His words of forgiveness and to be united with Him in His Holy Meal.

This is what we are talking about. This faith is living and active. It seeks to be with the Triune God, it seeks to express our gratitude by serving all those many people, whom God has placed in our lives. This **faith alone** fills us with divine joy and peace that surpasses all our understanding until they overflow.

This is what the Lutheran Reformation was and is about. It brings us back to the life-giving Word of God as our higher authority. It gives us the pure Gospel which is God’s power for salvation. Grace alone. Christ alone. Faith alone.

And you, you are the heirs of courageous and faithful Lutheran Reformers, you are the blessed recipients of this Gospel, you are the privileged guardians of this power for salvation. You have received the same Spirit which guided them.

May He grant us such courage and faithfulness and bless us so richly that through us the message of grace alone, Christ alone and faith alone can reach many and many. Blessed Reformation Day, Brothers and Sisters!

Amen.