

Reformation Day Sermon

It's all about Jesus. Always has been. Always will be.

Jesus was present before the very creation of Life.

John 1 begins...

In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. He existed in the beginning with God. God created everything through him, and nothing was created except through him. The Word gave life to everything that was created, and his life brought light to everyone. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it. John 1:1–5 (NLT)

And then in verse 14, that amazing declaration...

So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son. John 1:14 (NLT)

And then the final words of Jesus to his disciples...

And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Matthew 28:20 (NLT)

It's all about Jesus. Always has been. Always has to be!

And that is why a compassionate pastor, **Pastor Martin Luther reacted** so vehemently, so radically, when he heard people preach that Jesus was not enough. He saw that the church was becoming more about the church, and buildings, and control, than it was about Jesus, and grace, and mercy. So, on October 31, 1517, he nailed 95 Thesis, 95 statements where he believed the church of his day was in error.

They had forgotten that it is all about Jesus. Always has been. Always has to be!

The problem is, as Rhys mentioned last week... we don't want it to just be about Jesus. We want it to be about **Jesus plus** something. Jesus plus my profession of faith. Jesus plus the pious feeling I have inside of me. Jesus plus the good works that I do. Jesus plus my moral lifestyle.

At times that might sound a little heretical, almost questioning the validity of what the New Testament writer, James said about 'faith without works being dead'. But as soon as we start thinking in terms of contributing to or participating with God in the action of making ourselves right with God, we have added to the Gospel. Indeed, Luther felt so concerned about this Jesus plus way of thinking, that he even called the book of James, in the bible, a straw epistle – something that had very little to do with the Gospel.

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So even when Jesus acknowledges Peter's great faith, Jesus responds...

"You are blessed, Simon son of John, because my Father in heaven has revealed this to you. You did not learn this from any human being. Matthew 16:17 (NLT)

Or as the apostle Paul put it...

...no one can say Jesus is Lord, except by the Holy Spirit. 1 Corinthians 12:3 (NLT)

It's all about Jesus. Always has been. Always has to be. Grace alone. Through faith alone... and even this faith is not our doing...

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— Ephesians 2:8 (NIV)

So why do we keep adding to the gospel.

Because deep down we find it hard to believe. Deep down we want to see checks and balances because we know that people will abuse that Grace. We know that people will abuse that freedom – just like Rhys spoke about how his Border Collie abused its freedom last week.

And we struggle with that, because that's the way our world works. We live in a system that demands checks and balances. There is nothing wrong with that. Because checks and balances has everything to do with how we live life outwards in community. If I did whatever I wanted, and didn't care about anybody else, and you all did the same, our society would be chaotic, and anarchic.

Checks and balances means that no one gets what they don't deserve. Everyone gets what they do deserve.

But that is the difference between living in community, and living with God. Luther spoke about it as the doctrine of two kingdoms – and while I'm not going to go into that today, what he is saying is that Kingdom on the Right, the kingdom of grace, is all about what God has done – it is about God coming to us. The Kingdom on the Left, the kingdom of law, is all about how we live life among each other, and the institutions that God has set up to make that happen. But more about that another time.

Put simply, Grace is when God gives us what we don't deserve. And mercy is when God doesn't give us what we do deserve. And our frail human minds can't fathom that.

That is why the Reformation was so profoundly important. It drew us back to the reality that it's all about Jesus. Always has been. Always has to be.

And it is about faith in what Jesus has done. Nothing more. Nothing less.

When we focus on Jesus, we stop focussing on doing, and start focussing on being. We stop worrying about whether we are enough or have done enough, and we simply live knowing that we already are enough. It's a subtle difference. But an important one. Because it takes our eyes off ourselves, and, focussing on Jesus, and him alone, we grow in the resilience, and the confidence, and the hope, and the abundant life, and the transforming love and grace, that God's heart first created for us.

That is how we overcome. It's not through what we have. It's not through what we do. It is not through the image we portray. It is simply through the confident trust that Jesus is more than enough!

Hence Luther said

“Faith is a living daring confidence in God's grace, so sure and certain that a person could stake their life on it a thousand times” Martin Luther