

HEARTBEATS- Staying Connected 10/11/2021

Dear Friends in Christ,

ONE AT ONE – *Every day this week beginning on Tuesday, October 12 you are encouraged to pray for one minute at one o'clock. This week, pray for generosity of heart as you consider the ways you can support God's mission in the world. Ask for the Holy Spirit's guidance in showing you how you can steward what you have received, that it might be blessing to others. Pray that God's Kingdom will continue to spread and that you can be an integral part of that increase.*

It was Martin Luther's study of the Letter to the Romans that led him to challenge the practice of the Roman Catholic church in his day of selling indulgences. Indulgences were special papers that granted time off from purgatory for the purchaser or someone for whom they purchased it. Purgatory was a sort of waiting room where you had to stay until all your unconfessed sins were paid for. Part of Luther's objection was that indulgences provided a benefit to the wealthy who could afford them, but not to the poorer who could only afford them at great sacrifice or not at all. More than this, though, Luther came to disagree with the whole concept of "paying for our sins" because it denied what Jesus Christ has done for us.

Romans 3:23-24 says, "...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus." And then in Romans 3:28 we read, "...a man is justified by faith..." In other words, first of all, we are all sinners. We have failed to be the people God has created and called us to be. Second, we are justified—found innocent of that failure—through grace—a free gift—that comes through Christ Jesus. Finally, that grace is received through faith, and Luther always added, "alone." It is through our faith alone in Jesus Christ, in His death and resurrection, that we have a loving relationship with God with no requirements for earning that love. It is, again, a free gift received in faith.

This teaching is a hallmark of what it means to be a Lutheran. A seminary professor once told us that the Lutheran church, more than any other, will say, "Your sins are forgiven...period." And that forgiveness is received through faith, which is also a gift from God. We Lutherans find our home with God because of faith in Christ Jesus and we celebrate that freedom from having to earn God's love.

Yet, we sometimes forget about this justification by grace through faith when we look at others. We have no problem acknowledging that all have sinned, and we rejoice in the words that we are saved through our faith. Nevertheless, we too often fail to let this message apply to others. Grace through faith is a wonderful thing when it applies to us, but when we look at the lives others, we will find the ways in which they fail to live according to God's will, and we, therefore, want to withhold God's forgiveness from them.

Why do we think grace applies to us but not them? Why do we sit in judgment of others when we have been spared judgment because of Jesus? We are all sinful, right? We have all failed to

be who God wants and hopes for us to be, right? Why, then, should we receive the love and forgiveness of God because of our faith, but not others because of their behavior, even when they also have faith?

Each week we hear the words of Jesus leading up to the sharing of Holy Communion: “this cup is the new covenant in My blood, shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sins.” That forgiveness is not received through merit—by our having earned it. It is a gift received in faith and it is available to all people who have faith. We need to let go of our judgments and condemnations of “them” because they do not live the way we think they should. And it’s not even our call. It is God’s alone. The only basis for determining who is deserving of God’s grace in Jesus Christ is faith—and Luther help to make this even more clear—through faith alone!

In Christ's love,
Pastor Jeffrey