

Many members. One body united in Christ.

The Festival of the Reformation

Psalm 119:46

26 October, Anno Domini 2025

Caiaphas demanded of Jesus “I adjure You by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.” And plainly Jesus said “You have said so.” Pilate demanded of Jesus “Are You the king of the Jews?” And plainly Jesus responded “You have said so.” Our Lord, with all boldness and confidence in the truth and faithfulness of His Father, your Father, spoke the truth of Holy Scripture before all men. It didn’t matter that it meant that He would be put to the greatest shame imaginable in the eyes of all who beheld Him. For telling the truth, that He was the Son of God sent to redeem mankind from eternal death, Jesus was stripped, flogged, beaten, and nailed to a cross, humiliated publicly, and mocked until He uttered His last word “*Tetelestai*,” “It is finished,” and atoned for your sin.

Jesus did not love His life in this world. He did not employ every power at His disposal in order to save face or avoid pain or gain anyone’s approval. That is because what Jesus loved was you. He loved sinners and He was willing to suffer all that was required so that you could be preserved from the eternal damnation that you have merited by your sin.

What Pilate thought of Him, what Caiaphas thought of Him, what the soldiers and crowds thought of Him - all of that was irrelevant to our Lord. What was relevant was the reality that unless He suffered the burning hot wrath of God against your sin, you would be left to suffer it for all of eternity in hell, forever separated from Him. This and this alone drove Jesus’ every word and every step. His will was bent on obtaining salvation for every last man, woman, and child who has or who will walk this earth. His will was to do the will of His Father which was to redeem us wretched sinners.

This wasn’t because we deserved it. The holy Law of God makes that abundantly clear. That good and perfect and righteous Law, when its light shines into our hearts, reveals one thing and one thing only - sin; deep, dark, filthy corruption. All of the hard work we put into creating a nice facade for the world so that people like us or fear us or look up to us - all of that is taken away and we are forced to confront the depth of our depravity and pride.

No one is innocent. No one gets a pass. No sin has an excuse. When the Holy Spirit says “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” he means all. If for a single moment we try to rest on anything we have done or even the fact that we

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are members of a church body that confesses all the right doctrine, then we have denied the Law and missed the whole point of God's gracious work through the Reformation. That was the false teaching that had come to fill the pulpits of the church and the hearts of men which God in His mercy raised up the reformers to root out.

There is absolutely no work any of us can do that will atone for our sins before God. It doesn't matter one whit what any other person thinks about you. God alone is your Creator and God alone is the one before whom each and every one of us will stand on the Last Day to give account. Any, regardless of station or denominational affiliation or family history who stand before the judgment seat and point to anything they have done, will receive for eternity the just punishment for their sins. "For by works of the law no human being will be justified in God's sight." Not a single person will enter eternal life because they were a good person. There is no good enough. There is only either perfect or eternally condemned. There is nothing in between. And Scripture is clear - there is nothing good in our flesh. Not a single thing has been left uncorrupted by sin. There is no spark of good left in man that only needs encouraging. "And you were once dead in your sins and your trespasses."

And only those who truly believe and confess this about themselves can receive the salvation which God has prepared in Christ Jesus. Only the person who freely confesses that they are enslaved to sin has cause to cry out to God for mercy and to seek the freedom of the Son.

This is the conscience that drove the Reformation. Such a conscience doesn't need works of satisfaction to find peace. It knows those are worthless and can't help him. Works and sinful desires are what bring the conscience into despair because it knows that even the holiest and most pious looking things it can manage are no better than a pile of filthy rags before God. Only one thing can calm the despairing heart - completely free and undeserved mercy. Only if God graciously covers over my sins with the Blood of another can I have any hope of good and eternal salvation. Only if there is a righteousness apart from the Law can I be saved.

And this is exactly what God has done through the death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ. Freely from His pure grace and mercy God the Father has offered up His Son to death to take our punishment. And freely does He bestow that salvation upon us. For absolutely nothing, God causes the Gospel of salvation to be preached to all who hear. He rejoices to receive even a single sinner who repents and receive in faith that the Lord Jesus Christ died FOR HIM and that his

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sins have been removed from him as far as the east is from the west. At zero cost does God pour out the life-giving washing Holy Baptism and make for Himself beloved children out of condemned sinners who now gather to their heavenly Father's table eager to be fed by Him with the life-giving bread of Jesus' flesh and the cleansing wine of Jesus' Blood.

That is what we commemorate when we observe the Festival of the Reformation - not Luther or religious freedom. We celebrate and give thanks to God that the glorious truth of salvation apart from the works of the law was preserved and brought out from under the demonic lie that our works or efforts or decisions played any role in our eternal salvation. Every Christian should memorize Article 4 of the Augsburg Confession so that it may be a constant comfort and refuge when the guilt of sin is brought again before our eyes and our own flesh, urged on by the devil's army of false teachers, begins to imagine that our works play even the tiniest role in salvation, casting us further into despair and the terror of hell. Hear again the words of that beloved article: "Our churches teach that people cannot be justified before God by their own strength, merit, or works. People are freely justified for Christ's sake, through faith, when they believe that they are received into favor and that their sins are forgiven for Christ sake. By His death, Christ made satisfaction for our sins. God counts this faith for righteousness in His sight."

That is the truth upon which the Christian Church stands. Without it, it falls. That is the one (not one of many) true Christian faith outside of which there is no salvation because outside of that there is no Christ. There is no other version of the true Gospel by which we can be saved. And that is teaching of Holy Scripture. Not even the gates of hell can prevail against the pure Gospel.

It is not out of some kind of denominational pride or foolish sense of intellectual superiority that we say we preach and teach all the articles of faith purely. Rather, it is because we believe the Bible and we do not dare invite God's wrath by changing what He has said by even a single letter. The true Christian Church insists upon pure doctrine from Scripture because there is only one way of salvation - the Lord Jesus Christ crucified, risen, and ascended into heaven. And this Lord Jesus has clearly given to His Church the gifts of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion as means by which He delivers the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. This same Lord Jesus has plainly promised that "whoever believes and is baptized will be saved." Sinners of every stripe need to hear these things plainly and purely so that they too may believe the practically unbelievable - that the sinless Son of God has taken on human flesh and offered Himself as the atoning sacrifice for their sins. They need to hear the testimony of God that completely

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apart from works of the law, anything they could ever hope to do, God has obtained and would freely bestow salvation upon them as a gift. Because anything less than a full and free forgiveness for Christ's sake is utter damnation. Whoever would teach anything less than the pure Word of God in any of the articles of faith will answer for God for the poor souls they led astray and away from Jesus.

How richly and wonderfully blessed we are by God Almighty to hear and receive the immeasurable treasure of the pure Gospel and the pure teaching and confession of the Christian faith! Would that all people would have and believe and be comforted by these things. We should in no way be ashamed of these things or of boldly confessing them before the world. How loveless of us if we hide the bright light of pure truth and life because we don't want to be thought of by those who are perishing as prideful or intolerant.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, we celebrate this day the pure Word of God and the glorious true Gospel. No works of satisfaction. No decisions. No indulgences. Just mercy for poor miserable repentant sinners who acknowledge their wretchedness before God and believe His promise that He has already made full atonement for all their sins in Jesus. We do give thanks to God this day for all of the faithful saints, including men like Dr. Luther, who have boldly confessed this true faith even under the threat of death and through whom God has preserved the preaching of the pure Gospel for us still today so that we too may hear and believe and be saved. And we pray that God would strengthen us by His Holy Spirit to speak of His testimonies before kings, friends, relatives, coworkers, neighbors, and strangers and not be ashamed. Let us rejoice to know and joyfully confess the pure doctrine of Christ which rescues sinners from death. Let us boast, not in ourselves, but in the Lord and sing His praises who by His great mercy has accomplished our salvation and deigns to bestow such a treasure upon us freely of His mercy. To God alone by glory!

In the Name of +Jesus.

Pastor Ulmer

(We stand.) The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.