

## AREA REFORMATION SERVICE, BETHLEHEM LUTHERAN CHURCH, CARMEL, IN NOVEMBER 4<sup>th</sup>, 2018 – 4pm

Text: **Hebrews 10:23** <sup>23</sup> **Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.**

The 500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation is now a memory. Do you remember this logo from a year ago imprinted with the words, "Reformation 500", a graphic of Luther, and key words highlighting the Reformation, "Grace, Faith, Scripture." There are the dates 1517-2017. Sweatshirts, t-shirts, coffee mugs were sold at Northwestern Publishing House. I don't know of any paraphernalia created for this year's celebration. Where were you about this time last year? I would guess many of you were right here attending a special service of celebration for the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary. On Sunday, November 5<sup>th</sup>, I was not in a church per say. I was blessed the district-wide service at the Dow Center in Saginaw, MI where more than 2200 other Christians celebrated the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary with a large singing choir, a brass choir and the largest Holy Communion Service I had ever witnessed and participated. Have you heard of any large service being held this year? No. Why? The 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary is now a memory. Yet, we gather together today to remember that God's gracious work in his church did not end in 1517. It did not end with the posting of the 95 theses and the printing of those theses soon after. It had only just begun. Momentous events would happen in the church in 1518 – 500 years ago THIS year. The events that happened that year would remind and us that **God remains ever-faithful. 1. He remains faithful to the promises he graciously provides. 2. He remains faithful in renewing our hope him!**

### **GOD IS EVER FAITHFUL!**

#### **Part I: He graciously provides His promises!**

What happened in the year 1518? In April of that year an event was held called the Heidelberg Disputation. Martin Luther was provided an opportunity to expand upon his concerns. Another set of theses were composed. Some theologians would conclude that this disputation was, in many ways, more significant than the 95 theses. For they advanced Luther's growing realization that the theology of his day was fundamentally and essentially at odds with Biblical teaching. The theses teach reliance on the promises of God in Jesus Christ!

First of all, the theses focus our attention on the God's holy law. They teach us to abandon the "theology of glory." Man seeks glory from within himself. The works of man are viewed as a glorious thing. Yet such work-righteousness lacks promise and fulfillment within: Enticing pleasure and treasure, status in increasing amounts – this is where glory is to be found, man concludes. Human works appear attractive outwardly. They appear good and beautiful to the doer and to others who see the display.

Yet God does not judge according to appearances but searches the minds and hearts. The law of God demands that I work for my salvation and demands nothing but perfection. **Galatians 3:10 "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law."** We find in ourselves nothing but sin, foolishness, death and hell. There is no beauty in our works, only depravity. The law of God leads me to utter despair of my own ability. I am led to recognize that I am nothing more than a poor beggar before God. The law brings the wrath of God, kills, accuses, judges and condemns. This is a key conclusion of the 1518 Heidelberg Theses. This is a key point of the holy law of our God who is faithful God.

There is only one place where we find refuge for our salvation. Not in our human works, but in Jesus alone and his work alone. His work was (and is) so utterly despised by the world- **Isaiah 53:3-4** <sup>3</sup> **He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.** <sup>4</sup> **Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted.** Our faithful God hid his glory in the suffering of the cross. (Many say, "I worship God by viewing nature; by visiting the Grand Canyon; by viewing the beauty of Brown County; by working in my garden; by staring at a moonlit sky on a starry night.") However, it does the person no good to recognize God in his glory and majesty, unless he recognizes him in the humility and shame of the cross. Those who would see God would see his Son, Jesus Christ and him crucified. No one comes to the Father, but by Him! Remember the focus of the Apostle Paul handed down to us: "We preach Christ crucified" (1 Co. 1:23). Remember the song of the saints and angels in heaven, '**Worthy is the Lamb that was slain..**' (Re. 5:12). This is another key point of the 1518 Heidelberg Theses. This is a key point of God's wondrous gospel promise.

The certainty of my eternal salvation is centered in God's love – God's love for a sinner like me! **Ephesians 1:4** **For he chose us in him before the creation of the world.** There were no works of man to bring about this eternal choosing. Works contributed nothing to my salvation – not my thinking; not my choosing. In eternity there was only God – the good and gracious God who promised to love me and has kept that promise throughout the ages – fulfilling that promise of his love for me by sending his Son, Jesus. Before there was LIFE, there was LOVE – God's eternal love for me! You and I (sinners) are not loved because we are attractive, but sinners are attractive because they are loved. The love of God gave us life through his Son. If you ever doubt his love; if you doubt that God loved you, that he chose you, look to Christ who lived righteously for you. Look to Christ, who redeemed you by his blood! I am made righteous in holy through Jesus and only through Jesus!

Such an infinite love of God did not leave Martin Luther standing idle 500 years ago this year. It does not leave us standing idle either. His promises renew our hope to live to serve him!

## **Part II: He compassionately renews our hope!**

What was happening in Martin Luther's life exactly 500 years ago? In October-November 1518 was receiving an important visitor. A year after the 95 theses were posted, an Ambassador from the Pope and Rome, Cardinal Cajetan, was meeting with Luther in the German city of Augsburg. Cajetan was directed to not debate Luther, but to insist that Luther utter one simple Latin Word: "*Revoco!*" "I recant." Rome wanted Luther to take back all the things he had written and said against indulgences and other teachings. Luther said, "No," to *revoco* and instead pressed Cajetan for clarity on where he was in error.

How could Luther take such a stand to hold unswervingly to the hope he professed? The answer: A God-given faith in the certainty of Holy Scriptures unchanging truth! Nothing was more perilous to the church than the loss of God's truth. Nothing was more precious than the life and light of God's Word! The same is true today. Our faithful God is so gracious to hand down to us his unchanging Word. The devil is working with deep guile and great might to create doubt in our hearts, so that we might so that we might utter a simple "*revoco*" of that word with our lips and then with our lives. The temptation to give to succumb to the scourge of compromise is very real. The shift away from the clear, unchangeable teaching of Holy Scripture as people rally toward the corrupt opinions and proclivities of sinful man is not only a *possibility*, but a present-day *reality*. Where the glorious Gospel of Christ is compromised eternal hope is not renewed; it is replaced by a vast wasteland hopeless apathy toward the Word and apostasy toward the Church bought by Christ's own blood.

Jesus renews my hope when he points to us and proclaims, "...**you are my really disciples**" (John 8:31). But we dare not forget the phrase he speaks just before that, **John 8:31-32 "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. <sup>32</sup> Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."** Freedom is not found in sinning; freedom is not found in our works. Freedom is found in the sure gospel of God's infallible word. Through that Word the Holy Spirit renews my hope. We the help of our ever-faithful God we are able to hold unswervingly to the hope we profess.

Jesus renews my hope through the means of grace! **Psalm 46:4-5 <sup>4</sup> There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells. <sup>5</sup> God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at break of day.** There will be storms in life that threaten to shaken our faith. Yet my faithful God is the source of my gladness. He provides the river of his righteousness that now clothes me. Come what may, I am glad even when perplexing troubles seek to overwhelm my faith. For God has made me part of his city – the Holy Christian Church. There in the refuge of my baptism I know I am at peace with my God. There in the gracious gift of his body and blood given for me for the forgiveness of sins, I rest. I have his promise that the gates of hell will not prevail against his church. God will be my refuge and strength, and ever-present help in trouble. "In you is gladness, amid all sadness, Jesus sunshine of my heart."

Our hope is renewed to share my hope with others. He gives me new life to confess his name boldly. At the end of Hebrews chapter 10, Christians are encouraged not to "shrink back," (verses 38,39) in confessing the truth of his unchanging word. <sup>37</sup> **For in just a very little while, "He who is coming will come and will not delay. <sup>38</sup> But my righteous one will live by faith.** Since Christ lives in us through faith so he arouses us to do good works through that living faith in his work. Like the darkness that quickly settles on us on a fall night, so also thick darkness has covered many hearts. But God has called us "the light of the world" and compels us the share that light with our lips and with our lives. We know Jesus could come back at any time. Here is the wonderful status we have before God because of Jesus: <sup>39</sup> **But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.**

The 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of 2017 is a memory. However, the momentous events of 1518 remind us that the reformation continued. 2017 is past, but the reformation continues. The reformation of our own hearts continues as we die to sin each day, sincerely repenting of our sins. The reformation continues as we despair of our own works for our salvation and trust in the unfailing mercy of Christ and his cross. We are not alone! The reformation continues with our ever-faithful God who provides his promises and renews our hope in him! Amen.