

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

The Holy Spirit birthed a brand-new church at the festival of Pentecost over 2000 years ago. The Holy Spirit blew into the room and tongues of fire rested upon the disciples. Fire represents the Presence of God. Before Pentecost, the disciples knew of Jesus from what He taught them. After Pentecost, the Spirit of Jesus, namely the Holy Spirit, resided within the disciples. They were filled with power, dynamic power, dynamite power from God. Before Jesus ascended into heaven, He made this promise to the disciples, "**Acts 1:8 (TLB)** *"⁸ But when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, you will receive power to testify about me with great effect, to the people in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth, about my death and resurrection."* Following Pentecost, the church experienced explosive growth. By the time the original disciples died, the Gospel had been spread throughout the Roman Empire into Asia and India. One of my favorite stories is that of Lydia, seller of purple. She was the first person in Europe to be converted to Jesus. Most of us have ancestors that go back to Europe. Thank God for Lydia and the faith that been passed on to her and all the way down to us. The Gospel is explosive.

Since the first century, the church has gone through various cycles up until this day and will do so until the day of Jesus Christ's return. In the 16th century the church leadership had gone into the dirt. The abuse of power was enormous. Before the printing press, only the priests had access to the Word of God, and it was most often chained to the altar. It was read in a language that many people did not understand. The Gospel was not being preached, taught, or heard. Salvation was only granted by the church which gave the church too much control over the people. On top of that, most of the bishops were put into office by purchasing the office, not according to their walk with the Lord Jesus. Salvation was by works and you could buy your way and that of your relatives into heaven by giving money to the church, purchasing indulgences. It is my opinion that the church was at its lowest point.

Probably no one person has impacted human history in the last 500 years more than Martin Luther, the founder of the Lutheran church. Pope Leo the X called Luther "a wild boar in the vineyard of the Lord" (Erwin W Lutzer, *Rescuing the Gospe*, pg. 31). He did not mean that as a compliment. Of course, Luther returned the favor and called him the antichrist. Martin was born on November 10, 1483. This was 9 years before Columbus sailed the ocean blue in 1492.

His early education was one of the strictest of disciplines where the rod was frequently used. It was a highly superstitious era where the rustling of a leaf could send shivers of fear down your spine. Quoting Dr Lutzer, "In those early years, Luther experienced periods of depression, already well aware that he was a sinner who needed relief from the demons that seemed to plague him. When he enrolled in the University of Erfurt to study law, he was not free from his [overly] sensitive conscience, which reminded him that he was a sinner who needed to find a way to become right with God" (ibid. pg.33).

In July of 1505 Luther had a life changing experience. Walking, he got caught in a violent thunder and lightening storm. A bolt of lightning hit right in front of him and scared him to death. Praying to Saint Anne, he cried, "Help Me! I will become of monk," and that he did. His father was furious that Martin withdrew from studying law and joined an Augustinian monastery. The monks lived in abject poverty and Martin's father wanted him to be a rich lawyer and take care of him in his old age. It took time, but they were reconciled.

In the monastery the monks did all they could to earn God's acceptance. They were reminded that purgatory was for those who were not good enough for heaven and not bad enough for hell (ibid. pg. 34). When it came time for death all one could do was plead to the Lord's mother, Mary, for leniency and grace.

Luther was filled with terror when it came God. He knew he needed the merit of Christ in order to get into heaven, but he also knew that he had to earn that merit himself. He worked intensely, day by day, vigorously to earn the necessary merits in order to appease God's wrath.

Dr. Lutzer quoting the classic biography of Luther by Roland Bainton writes, "The rigors of monastic life were explained, which included "the renunciation of self-will, the scant diet, rough clothing, vigils by night and labors by day, mortification of the flesh, the reproach of poverty, the shame of begging, and the distastefulness of cloistered existence" (ibid pg 35).

After one year of training, Luther was fully accepted into the monastic order. Prayers were scheduled seven times a day including, between 1 and 2 o'clock in the morning.

Sadly, Luther struggled terribly with depression and despair. His heart was deeply troubled for he was not meeting the demands of a God who demanded more than Luther could attain. His conscience continually beat him up day and night.

Luther fasted so often that his friends feared it might kill him. He prayed more than was required and slept in the cold of winter without blankets in order to mortify, to make his human body suffer. Quoting Luther, "If I had kept on any longer, I should have killed myself with vigils, prayers, reading, and other work" (ibid 38 quoting Bainton). Deep in his tortured soul he knew that he could not satisfy God at all.

Enters into the life of Martin Luther a marvelous mentor and confessor; his name is Johann Staupitz. Johann knew deeply of God's saving grace. Johann was a true Christian through and through. God gave to Johann a love for Luther and Johann did all he could to bring help, to bring peace to the tortured soul of Luther. **1. God knows which people to bring into your life at the right time and the right place to move you forward in Christ.** God sees the state of your soul and knows exactly who He can use to bring much needed help and truth, and always with love. All of us have had key people in our lives who have helped us, and we will always be indebted to them. And the best way to pay back that debt is to be that person, that messenger from God, that angel if you will, for someone that God places right in front of you. It can even make the difference between heaven and hell. A person in this church was at a party and met someone whose soul was searching. He became a Johann Staupitz to this young

college student and now that person's soul and life has been saved for all eternity. They have a lifetime bond in Christ and all because God flooded his heart with love for this young man's soul. We all need a Johann in our lives, and we can be a Johann as we say yes to God's calling to be so.

Quoting Dr Lutzer, "Johann instructed Luther to simply love God. But how could he love the God he dreaded? How could he love a God who judged sinners and damned them to hell? 'Love God?' 'I hate him.'" (ibid, pg 43) Johann spoke words of hope to Luther, words of the Gospel, words that Luther did not hear growing up because the Gospel had been silenced by the church. "If is had not been for Dr. Johann Staupitz, I should have sunk into hell," so said Luther.

2. The Good News of Jesus Christ and the forgiveness He brings never grows old.

3. The people who need to hear the Gospel the most are all of us daily.

Johann knew exactly what Luther needed. He needed to discover the Gospel, the Good News of Jesus Christ through studying the Bible and teaching the Bible as a professor. Often it is the teacher of a study group that gains the most and this was true for Luther. In the Bible Luther found the answer his soul longed for (ibid. pg. 45). He began teaching the Psalms and heard the pleas of Christ on the cross. He found Jesus all through the Psalms. In Psalm 22, which Jesus quoted on the cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me." Luther felt a connection to Christ because Jesus felt deserted by God. Feeling alienated by God must have felt worse for Jesus than any alienation Luther felt. Luther realized the alienation came when all the sins of the world were placed on Jesus. Jesus bore our iniquity, all our sins on the cross. Jesus bore the wrath of God that we deserve, and this is proof of God's great and fantastic love for us. God's wrath does not touch the believer because Jesus bore it all. Luther's tortured soul was being spoken to and directly addressed by God Himself through the study of Scripture.

When Luther taught the first chapter of Romans, God's grace broke through like a dam that had been broken. God's grace overflowed into Luther's soul, and it never stopped. This one phrase broke the dam that had been holding Luther back. **4. The righteous, the just shall live by faith" Romans 1:17. 5. In Romans 4:5 (NLT2) ⁵ But people are counted as righteous, not because of their work, but because of their faith in God who forgives sinners.**

In Luther's own words, "I greatly longed to understand Paul's Epistle to the Romans. My situation was that, although an impeccable monk, I stood before God as a sinner troubled in conscience, and I had no confidence that my merit would appease God. Therefore, I did not love a just and angry God, but rather hated and murmured against him. Yet I clung to the dear Paul and had a great yearning to know what he meant. Night and day I pondered until I saw the connection between the justice of God and the statement that 'the just shall live by faith'. Then I grasped that the justice of God is that righteousness by which through grace and sheer mercy God justifies us through faith. Thereupon I felt myself reborn and to have gone through the open doors into paradise.... This passage of Paul became to me a gate to heaven.... If you have a true faith that Christ is your Savior, then at once you have a gracious God, for faith leads you in and opens up God's heart and will that you should see pure grace and overflowing love. This it is to behold God in faith that you should look upon his fatherly, friendly heart, in which there is no anger nor ungraciousness. He who sees God as angry does not see him rightly, but looks only on a curtain, as if a dark cloud had been drawn across his faith" (Roland Bainton, A Life of Martin Luther, pg. 49-50).

Guttenberg's printing press had recently been invented. Luther took to the pen and wrote books and pamphlets making clear the abuses of the church. He gained popularity throughout Germany and further. His writings went everywhere. The people who agreed with Luther began to protest against the church and they became known as the protestants. Names like Zwingli and John Calvin were also great leaders in reforming the church, hence the term the

reformation. Until the day of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit will continue to reform the church back to the Word of God, forward by the Word of God.

Friends, in this church we stand for Bible study. We want everyone in the Bible for faith comes by the hearing, the hearing of the Word of God. The Word of God is a pathway for God's grace to enter our lives and sustain us always. "For you will know the truth and the truth will set you free and Jesus is the truth. The true Jesus was discovered by Luther with the help of Johann and his personal study in preparing his lectures as a college professor at Wittenberg. Luther had been in the church his entire life and always felt rejected by God until the moment when it became clear to him that the righteousness that God requires for salvation is a gift freely given by grace through faith. That means the perfect merits of Jesus are given to us that saves us. We don't earn them; we receive them by faith. It is a gift freely given. God Himself births the faith inside of you to believe. This is exactly what we stand for as a church. We are a Lutheran reformed church. The work the reformers did 500 years ago stands strongly in St. Mark Lutheran church, not the culture of our day which says yes to sin and no to God's Word. We are a mainline church that still believes in the Bible unashamedly.

I close with this truth. **6. By the grace of God, purchased with the blood of Jesus on the cross, God is 100% for you. Amen and Amen.**