

Pako Morning Service: 30/10/16

Reading: Rom 3:9-31; Eph 2:1-10; Message: "Saved by Grace alone through faith alone"

Beloved people of God,

Tomorrow we celebrate Reformation Day. We remember when Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the doors of Wittenberg Castle. He particularly outlined his objections to the teaching and practices of the Roman Church that had gone beyond the Scriptures. Here are just three of the 95 thesis: "They preach human folly who pretend that as soon as money in the coffer rings a soul from purgatory springs." "Those who think that letters of indulgence will spare them will be eternally damned with their teachers." "Every true Christian whether living or dead will share in the benefits of Christ and the Church."

Congregation, think carefully and deeply about how liberating the reformation was. Just imagine if the leadership of the church insisted, coerced, blackmailed you into thinking that you had to contribute \$100 every week to the offering, if you wished to save your soul. What a terrible and frightening way to live! So we have much reason to give thanks for the reformation.

Now we need to remember that although Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, Knox and others were instrumental in the Reformation, it was the Lord who was fulfilling his plan of salvation for the elect! It was the Holy Spirit who made plain to Luther and others that salvation for a sinner was by Grace alone, through Faith alone, by Christ alone and was contained in the Scriptures alone, and all to the glory of God alone!

Romans 1:16-17; that were the most liberating verses in Scripture for Dr M Luther. "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

Notice v17: In the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last. In other words, from beginning to end, the righteousness of Christ covers all our sin and makes us right with God! It was when Luther first understood these verses in Scripture that he realized he was saved by through faith alone in the completed work or if you will, in the righteous works of Christ alone! It leaves no room for our works to be added. But there are many more references in Scripture that mention these truths.

Jn 3:16; teaches that belief in Christ alone is the way of salvation. Jn 14:6; reminds us that Jesus is the only way to heaven. Acts 4:12 reminds us that salvation is found in no other name but Jesus. Eph 2:1-10 certainly outlines the grace alone and faith alone aspects of the reformation. 2 Tim 3:15ff makes it very clear that it is Scripture alone that is able to make us wise to salvation, for the Scriptures are "God breathed."

Now you might be sitting here this morning and thinking, "So what? What does it profit us to believe that the Scriptures teach these five "solos" of the reformation? Well this is the so "what!" What a great comfort it is to us personally to know, that "in Christ we are right with God and heir to everlasting life." Surely there is no better news! Now we know that because we have been taught that for years.

What a great privilege in our evangelism efforts. We don't need to say to our desperately searching friend, "If you want to be saved to eternal life, you better go to church every week! Or, make sure you put \$50.00 or \$100.00 in the church coffers every week." No – none of that! All we need to say is believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour and you are saved! No strings attached. What a simple liberating message to give. Indeed, what a winsome message to give.

Unfortunately, no matter how winsomely I have conveyed those wonderful truths, there is no guarantee that it will help my friend come to faith. Indeed, Scripture teaches that without the Holy Spirit help, I would never believe this wonderful teaching. The reason being that my sinful nature is inclined to hate God and my neighbour! The greatest barrier to faith is our sinful hearts.

We cannot come to faith on our own. On our own we cannot choose salvation and we cannot choose eternal life! Eph 2:1 says it so plainly. We were dead in our sins and trespasses! Dead people don't choose! So we need help! And thanks be to God for he graciously provides that help! He comes to us with his Holy Spirit and quickens us to new life by enabling us to respond to his grace. And up until such time, we all followed Satan; we were all disobedient; we were all by nature objects of wrath!

And that was Luther's point. It didn't matter how much money you put in the coffers of the church, you could never purchase someone else's salvation, much less your own! All the indulgencies in the world couldn't pay for the salvation of your soul! We need God's help. So when someone says they know Jesus as their Saviour and Lord, it presupposes the gift of faith.

Now of course, being right with God is only important to those who believe God exists. If we do not acknowledge God as Creator or Jesus as Saviour and Lord, then being right in God's sight will remain an irrelevant teaching. That's why we should constantly be in prayer in any evangelism effort, that the Holy Spirit will make hearts responsive!

So many people in the world live from day to day in ignorance of God. Many cannot think of goodness, satisfaction, and happiness apart from things. If you haven't got the latest car, you can't be happy! If you haven't got a 100% healthy body, or you're not trim, taut and terrific, you can't be satisfied! And that is why some preachers present the gospel in terms of extravagant promises, sometimes referred to as the health and wealth gospel. We hear things like, "Accept Jesus as Saviour and you will be delivered from all the nasties and bad situations in your life."

Or, "Believe in God and you will be instantly happy, full of joy, experience good relationships, and you will prosper." Some even say that by giving more and praying more intensely that you will see more tangible blessings in your life. As a result, we hear of people winning golf tournaments by the power of prayer. We hear of people being healed by the power of prayer rather than God graciously answering their prayer. Yet, ironically, that's when people take note, when there seems to be a faith that pays dividends. Congregation we can never be right with God or heir to eternal life if it is based on some monetary value or reward or something we have to do!

The Scriptures teach that we are only right with God in Christ and in Him alone! That doesn't mean that the Scriptures do not speak of a benefit, they do, and it's a great dividend that is beyond description. Sins forgiven, guilt removed, peace with God, and last but not least, eternal life. All received through faith alone, in Christ alone, by grace alone, taught in the Scripture's alone and all to the glory of God alone. And it is the "God" question which the Holy Spirit creates in people's hearts that causes them to ask the serious questions in life.

Since God exists and has created all things, how we are related to him? That is the nagging question which the devil seeks to dismiss in people's hearts. You ask the average person on the street, "Do you believe in an almighty God?" And some of them answer, "Sorry, haven't really thought about it!" The first question is not how we are related to each other, although that is important, but if the vertical isn't right, then the horizontal can never be right. That's why the message of the Bible is so positive.

The message of Scripture is not primarily that we all by nature are objects of God's wrath. Rather, the message of the Bible is about God's love for sinners and how we can be right with God in Christ. "Whoever believes in Christ is not condemned, but who ever does not believe stands condemned already" (John 3:18). And that message cannot be understood if we think that we don't need to be made right with God.

It cannot be understood if our state of sinfulness and condemnation is denied. Therefore, we need to teach people, yes sensitively and carefully, their great debt before a holy God and what misery that brings them. Dr. Don Carson in his book, the Love of God, says, "If you are going to teach people about the love of God in Christ, you need to find a hundred different ways to speak to people about their sin!" Our only hope to be right with God and have eternal life is in God's loving solution.

Eph 2:4 "But because of his great love for us, God who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions. It is by grace you have been saved!" Grace. God's Riches At Christ's Expense! Or as Paul writes in Romans 3:21, "A righteousness [namely Jesus Christ] from God, apart from the law, has been made known, ...This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe."

Through the Holy Spirit's work, my conscience accuses me of having sinned against all God's commandments, and of never having kept any of them, and what's more that I am still inclined to all evil! The Holy Spirit destroys my spiritual pride and self-confidence so that I might boast in the cross and place my confidence in Christ alone and to be clothed in his righteousness. Unless our hands are emptied of self, they cannot be filled. All our promises, all our self examination, all our meditation, all our self righteousness, all our charity, will not make us right with God!

And the great news about believing in Jesus Christ is that negatively we will not be condemned and positively we will inherit eternal life. That is our Christian comfort, our great benefit! And we receive this wonderful grace through faith

alone. We must never deny that Christ saves and that it must be received by faith. Hence Scripture's great teaching that we are justified by faith alone! Just as if I never sinned! An acronym for faith – "Forsaking All, I Trust Him." This is what we must learn again and again, to trust completely in the Saviour and having faith in his completed work! It's not faith plus works, or faith plus charity as the Council of Trent puts it. It's not Scripture plus tradition or what the priest says. It's not grace plus our obedience. It's not Christ plus saints or letters of indulgency.

Please beware of the little conjunction word 'and' when it comes to our belief. When people say the Scriptures "and" or grace "and" or Christ "and" or faith "and" then the alarm bells should be ringing. Remember the word alone! We also need to remember that faith is a gift, so that no one can boast. The strength of our faith doesn't save us. The saving work of Christ is the only ground of righteousness before God. Faith is a little like a hand. It receives the gift. To receive it, the hand is indispensable. However, we do not give credit to the hand of the beggar for the generous gift placed in that hand.

Our faith is never the ground for our righteousness before God. We don't believe in our beliefs or in our strong faith, because then they become our works. We believe in our loving faithful God who provided his Son as our righteousness. That is all we need to do! So our faith is more than just a theory about Jesus' death for our sins. Faith embraces Jesus. Faith means letting yourself be loved by God. It embraces that only Christ's satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness make us right with God! We can only make it our own by faith alone!

Of course our response, all our loving and all our doing will be a result from being declared righteous, forgiven and loved. When we speak to our unbelieving neighbour about Jesus Christ we don't do so to earn some brownie points. When we give generously to kingdom work, we don't do it because our soul will be spared purgatory. We do it, for we are thankful for Jesus.

One more thing, our response to God's love in Jesus Christ should not become a new covenant law. I am not here today to put anyone on a guilt trip. Some Christians like to do that, but let's not go there. Christ has fulfilled the law so there may be righteousness for everyone who believes. This is the era of grace. So don't say to St Peter that he should let you into heaven because you gave generously to the church or even that you spoke to your neighbour about Jesus Christ, or that you played in the band or sang in the choir. That would be dishonouring our Saviour God.

We are saved, through faith alone in Christ alone, by grace alone for this faith is a gift of God, guided by Scripture alone, all to the glory of God alone. **Amen.**