

SERMON FOR OCTOBER 29, 2023

TEXT: ROMANS 3:28

THEME: A SOUND BITE TO REMEMBER

For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.

In the name of Jesus:

We live in the age of the sound bite. A sound bite is simply a short phrase, or in the case of video, a short image that is captured and conveyed to the masses so that it is easy to remember. Often a sound bite is a phrase in a speech made by a politician that is uttered so that the media will capture it and convey that thought to the general public. Most politicians want to master the art of the sound bite, because when they do, their message is then remembered.

But there are other sound bites, perhaps we could call them video bites, that are used by others in order to not only capture our imagination but also to remember a message. Companies in advertising look for a phrase or an image that the consumer will remember so that people will buy their merchandise. Examples abound, in choosing peanut butter, mothers choose JIF. If buying a roll of paper towels, Bounty is the quicker picker upper. And who can forget the old Miller Lite Beer commercials: Less filling, tastes great.

We are bombarded by all sorts of messages today. And yet there is one message, one sound bite, if you will, that I want you to remember today and the rest of your life. That sound bite is the message of the Festival of the Reformation that we celebrate today. It is the message that Paul proclaims in our text from his letter to the Romans. The message is simply this: You are justified by faith.

But what does justify mean? If you have ever communicated via the written page, you probably have some experience in justifying. For example, when I type my sermon on my computer, the word processor justifies the document automatically, that is, it lines up the margins on the left side of the page, and is able to automatically create a paragraph for me when I write my sermon. That is in a sense what justifying is, it is lining something up so that the printed page lines up evenly.

Each and every human being needs to be lined up evenly with God. We need to be in sync with God, our ways and our actions need to be aligned with Him. But as we see in the Bible, we are born sinners, spiritually depraved, we not only do not have a right relationship with Him we don't have a right relationship with one another. Our hearts and our wills, our very lives are turned inward, so that our focus in life is not on God, how to please Him, how to love Him, or even how we can live with one another. We are born

spiritually selfish and self centered, and it manifests itself in our lives today. You don't have to teach a child how to be selfish, one of the first words they will say is the word mine. And so parents, families, and teachers will train children to be kind, to think of others, to not to be so selfish. But the problem remains, we are always looking inward toward ourselves, and as a result we shut out God and others from our lives and priorities, seeking first our will instead of loving God first and foremost and loving our neighbor as ourselves. Jesus says to seek first the Kingdom and His righteousness, but we would rather chase after worldly things and align our lives with the current culture than being aligned with God.

So what does God do? He has every right to punish us, for we are not right with Him. Our lives are not aligned with His will. We seek to justify ourselves before Him, citing our motives, our thoughts and our actions as reasons for God to be good to us. Some even get angry at God when things don't go their way, thinking, "well, I attended church on Sunday, and this happens to me?"

The bottom line is that no one is justified before God, no one is right with God because the Bible says: "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. There is no one right with God, no, not one for we are all like sheep who have gone astray." We have gone off in our own direction, thinking that

our way is the right way or the correct way to become right with God, but the way that seems right to us as sinners ends in temporal and eternal death.

But God's Good News is that He is gracious and merciful to us. He sees us in our fallen state and He has pity on us. This is the great truth that Martin Luther rediscovered which started the Reformation. That people are justified by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ. The Good News is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. **17** For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."

Martin Luther coined several phrases which summaries the Good News that God has for us in Jesus Christ. Think of these truths as sound bytes before sound bytes even existed. These truths are Grace Alone, Faith Alone, Scripture Alone, and Christ Alone.

Grace alone: man is saved purely by the grace of God, not on account of works, for by grace you have been saved through faith. Faith Alone; you are saved by faith in Christ as your Lord and Savior. Christ alone, Jesus Christ has done all that is necessary for your salvation to make you aligned and right with God. And this is the central truth of the Bible, of Holy Scripture, that the Bible reveals that man is saved by God's grace through faith in Christ as revealed in the Holy Scripture. Luther said that this is the central, most basic

teaching upon which the Church stands or falls. If the Church ceases to teach this, it is no longer the Church. Our Lutheran forefathers put it this way in one of their first confessions of faith called the Augsburg Confession: “We teach that people cannot be justified before God by their own strengths, merits, or works but are freely justified for Christ’s sake, through faith, when they believe that they are received into God’s favor, and that their sins are forgiven for Christ’s sake, who by His death has made satisfaction for our sins. This faith God imputes (that means He gives to you or assigns to you ) for righteousness in His sight. Faith receives what God gives to you all on account of Christ. Or as Paul puts it in our text: “For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.”“

A great way to understand all of this is to remember a story about a little boy who, when asked by his parents what he learned in Sunday School remarked, “I remember that God looks at me as if I never sinned.” That, my friend, is what it means to be justified in Christ, that God looks at you, all because of Jesus, as if you never sinned because you believe in Jesus as your Savior.

We are bombarded by all sorts of video clips and sound bytes each and everyday of our lives. The sound byte or motto of the day and age is to follow your heart. But to follow your heart is certain to lead you on the path to Hell,

because as a sinner your heart is cluttered with sin. So instead of following your heart, follow Jesus. Be different from the rest of the world. For Jesus lived, died, rose again, He ascended into heaven, and He lives for you today so that you in thanks can live for Him. You have been justified, put right, set straight, made friends with God . For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, so that whoever believes in Him will not perish but will have life everlasting. To the glory of God and in Jesus' name.

Amen