

IN NOMINE JESU

GOD'S MERCY IS POURED FORTH

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

What do you envision when you see the image of Jesus hanging on the cross?

In the Fellowship Room hangs a charter that records the public institution of the Body of Christ in Catalina Arizona that is known as Catalina Lutheran Church. On it are signatures of people. Some of them have left this congregation, drifting away to places where the Word is stifled in teaching and practice. Some have moved from here to receive God's gifts in other congregations where the Word is also purely preached and the Sacraments are also rightly administered. Some have left this assembly, and the Church Militant, and are now receiving the fulfillment of God's promises in the Church Triumphant. A few of those constituting members of God's Church in Catalina are still with us. (That is amazing, since the average stay for a church family in Tucson is reported to be 4.8 years)!

From the few among us who have been hearing the Word and receiving God's sacraments here for 26 years comes the knowledge of how deep the roots of our local family tree are planted. That is, we, as a congregation have been firmly rooted and grounded in the firm soil of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, watered with the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, nourished with the sprinkling of Holy Absolution, and strengthened with the eternal-life giving nutrition of the Sacrament of the Altar.

Those gifts of the Divine Gardener have aided the growth, stability, and seed spreading of Catalina Lutheran Church. God, tending this plant in this place, has

carefully nurtured for Himself a tree whose roots run deep into the Good News, whose branches have been pruned by the Law, whose fruit have produced another tree of the same stock not far from here, and whose pollen has spread into Mexico and Honduras through our members, and around the world through the missionaries we have helped to support through World Missions.

Acknowledging all that, what Biblical tenants has God used to grow this congregation, and His work through her, for the past 26 years?

At the center, in foremost place, is the teaching of Christ Jesus, and Him crucified for the sins of the Whole World. From that flows the reality that the death of Christ was for your sins, to pay the price God demanded for Adam's sin, and your sins. That doctrine is brought forth out of these words:

Because out of works of Law no flesh will be justified before Him, for on account of Law (comes) intimate knowledge of sin - but apart from Law righteousness of God appeared, having been witnessed by the Law and the prophets.¹

It has been said that the key doctrine of the Reformation is that of justification. That is, how the Church of the Crucified One views and teaches about Jesus' death determines how the fruits of the tree ripen and reproduce. The way the Church, and her members, view the image of Jesus hanging on the tree determines, to a large extent, how we view God's relationship to His Church, and His Church's relationship to Him. To help clarify what that means, look upon the image hanging on this pulpit. What does this bring into your mind?

¹ Romans 3:20-21.

- God's wrath poured out upon Jesus on account of your sins? Which leads to thoughts like this:

That Man is coming back, and boy, is He going to be angry that He had to suffer so on account of my sins! Or,

- God's mercy poured is forth from the death of Jesus on account of your sins.

That Man is coming back, and He loves me because His suffering and death has taken away my sins and their guilt.

That image, in the Church, we must agree if we want to be Church, depicts how God determined, before the foundation of the world, to fix the problem of sin and its attendant evil. That, among other things, is declared with these words:

For there remains no distinction: for all have sinned and fail to reach the glory of God, continually being justified freely by His grace through redemption of the One, Jesus Christ, Who was placed before God as propitiation on account of the faith in His blood...²

How one views the crucifixion, and its fruits, determines how one views the Gospel. That is, how the Church teaches of the Cross of Christ, determines how the members of the Church come to see the death of Jesus. When one reflects upon the image of the Crucified One with fear on account of His anger at the sins that placed Him on the tree, one comes to the conclusion that that wrath must be taken away.

On the other hand, when one reflects upon the image of the Crucified One with awe and love on account of His love in bearing sin into death that we might be free, one is led to the conclusion that all God's wrath has been taken away. It is this second

² Romans 3:22b – 25a.

manner of seeing God at work in the crucifixion of Jesus that this congregation has learned to cling to in her teaching, preaching and life. That is, as God has given us wisdom, we draw comfort from the reality that we have been declared right with Him – the meaning of the word “justified” – because of the death of Jesus.

Further, consolation comes from the declaration of the out-pouring of the blood of the sinless Son of Mary and Son of God to appease God’s wrath. To the churches about and around us who do not regularly declare these divine realities to we who sin so often, there is little comfort given or produced. The very words you will hear again today in the exhortation – “the boundless love that He showed us when He saved us from the wrath of God, sin, death, and hell by His blood” – ring as foreign to people schooled in congregations that focus only on the resurrection (the fruit of the cross) or the good moral teachings from the life of Jesus.

Yet, the declaration that God in the death of Jesus “saved us from the wrath of God... by His blood” should not be foreign in the congregations of God. That truth is simply a teaching drawn from the reality repeatedly declared today in your ears:

*Jesus Christ, Who was placed before God as propitiation on account of the faith in His blood...*³

There was a word just spoken that people in the Church, even in this congregation, do not use every day. It is a word that translates a concept with so much meaning. Yet it is a concept that has been mis-translated. In essence how the congregation, the Church translates that word that speaks of the work of the Blood of Christ, determines how the

Church views the Cross.

The word of which I am speaking is rightly translated: propitiation. Do you remember what that biblical word means? It means to pay the price for sin *and* to take away the wrath of God at sin. When Jesus' blood poured forth, when He died, He, following the God-established liturgy of the Old Covenant, entered into the Most Holy Place, as High Priest, and poured His blood (whether in reality or in spirit, it does not matter, and the texts do not say) as the final offering of the final sacrifice for sins for all who believe. That is the doctrine of the Reformation that this congregation has been given, has received, and has proclaimed over the past 26 years. Jesus' death has paid, once for all time, the wages of sin, and taken from us the wrath of God!

We declare that divine reality regularly knowing that congregations, even those who claim to be our sisters in the faith, do not. Others, claiming that we are separated brothers and sisters, teach that the outpouring of Jesus' blood on the cross, His entrance into the Holy Places, simply pays the price for sin, but does not take away the wrath of God. They use another word to translate the atoning sacrifice of Jesus. That is, they believe the half-truth, devised by man putting tradition and/or reason as the final interpreter of Scripture, that Jesus did not do all that was needed on the cross. For them we pray often.

For us, we cling to the words of Scripture that declare of the sacrificial, atoning death of Jesus:

³ *Romans 3:22b – 25a.*

In the forbearance of God, with the demonstration of His righteousness in the now, to the One Who is just and justifier to the one from (the) faith of Jesus.⁴

That is, God who is perfect, right and holy, has, in the death of Jesus, in His faith, declared to you, to whom He has given Christ's faith, that you are right with the Father.

As St. Paul says:

For man (is) accounted (as) having been justified by faith apart from works of Law.⁵

Or, as the confessions of the Evangelical Church say:

It is also taught among us that we cannot obtain forgiveness of sin and righteousness before God by our own merits, works, or satisfactions, but that we receive forgiveness of sin and become righteous before God by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith,² when we believe that Christ suffered for us and that for his sake our sin is forgiven and righteousness and eternal life are given to us.³ For God will regard and reckon this faith as righteousness, as Paul says in Romans 3:21-26 and 4:5.⁶

What then do you envision when you see Jesus hanging upon the cross?

Pray, let it be

God's mercy poured is forth from the death of Jesus on account of your sins.

That Man is coming back, and He loves me because His suffering and death has taken away my sins and their guilt.

The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus

Reformation (One-year series)

Psalm 46; Revelation 14:6-7; Romans 3:19-28; Matthew 11:12-19
October 31, 2008

Pastor Michael H. Morehouse

SOLI DEO GLORIA

October 31, 1517

October 31, 1982

⁴ Romans 3:26.

⁵ Romans 3:28.

⁶Tappert, T. G. 2000, c1959. *The book of concord : The confessions of the evangelical Lutheran church.* Fortress Press: Philadelphia