

Reformation 500: *Solus Christus*

The trees around the parsonage are finally bare of leaves (well, almost), and I noticed that the sun took a long time coming up this morning. As the seasons change, it's tempting to put aside the past and think only of what's ahead, especially now that Thanksgiving and Christmas are fast approaching. Before we turn that page, however, we should pause and think about the past with us, remembering the things on which our lives have been built.

When I was in St Louis in September, I was amused to hear some of the Seminary faculty quietly saying they were tired of hearing about Martin Luther. They've been writing papers and hearing lecturers on Luther for the past year now. Some, I think, were starting to see October 31 of this year as the 'finish line,' after which they could get back to their 'usual' studies.

Yes, our big celebrations of the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation are winding down, but that doesn't mean we should set it all aside and forget about it. In many ways, we haven't crossed a finish line. We've just crossed the starting line, with many important anniversaries yet to come. For all our celebrations of Luther's posting of his *Ninety-Five Theses*, the most significant year in Martin Luther's life wasn't 1517. It was 1519.

Luther was studying Paul's letter to the Romans, trying to understand the "righteousness" or "justice" of God. He had been taught that this referred to God's justice, by which God punishes sinners. Now, Luther new himself to be a sinner, but these words didn't seem fair. He later wrote that, because of these words,

"I did not love, no, rather I hated the just God who punishes sinners. In silence, if I did not blaspheme, then certainly I grumbled vehemently and got angry at God. I said, 'Isn't it enough that we miserable sinners, lost for all eternity because of original sin, are oppressed by every kind of calamity through the Ten Commandments? Why does God heap sorrow upon sorrow through the Gospel and through the Gospel threaten us with his justice and his wrath?' This was how I was raging with wild and disturbed conscience. I constantly badgered St. Paul about that spot in Romans 1 and anxiously wanted to know what he meant."

The very words we now see as good news brought Luther nothing but torment. Yet he continued to struggle with Paul's words, until at last, by the mercy of God, he paid attention to their context: "The righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written: 'The righteous shall live by faith' (Romans 1:17). "I began to understand," Luther later said, "that in this verse the justice of God is that by which the righteous person lives by a gift of God, that is by faith. . . . All at once I felt that I had been born again and entered into paradise itself through open gates."

This is the true treasure of the Reformation, the foundation stone of the past upon which God has built our faith, hope, and love, the article upon which the Church stands or falls: Salvation as a free gift, given by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone.

Yes, we have much for which to be thankful. As Thanksgiving Day approaches, we remember and give thanks to God for the fruits of the earth and the joys of family gatherings with which He has blessed us. We also give thanks for the precious Gospel, the free gift of God that has been revealed in Scripture alone: that God gives us His free gift of forgiveness and salvation by His grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. *Solus Christus*: "Christ Alone." That is the foundation upon which God Himself has built us, His Church. "O give thanks to the LORD, for He is good; for His steadfast love endures forever!" (Psalm 118:1)