

and scoops out all the yucky stuff. He removes the seeds of doubt, hate, and greed and makes you clean and forgiven. Then he carves on you a new smiling face and puts his light inside you to shine for all the world to see.

Because while it's true that the Gospel never changes, the Gospel always changes you. It allows you to look at yourself in a completely new way. There's a Christian song that puts it just right. "*You are more than the choices that you've made, You are more than the sum of your past mistakes, You are more than the problems you create, You've been re-made. 'Cause this is not about what you've done, But what's been done for you. This is not about where you've been, But where your brokenness brings you to. This is not about what you feel, But what He felt to forgive you, And what He felt to make you loved.*" You are more! You are God's child. Bought by Jesus love. Heir of eternal life. That's the Gospel!

This is why, on Reformation Day, I'm proud to be a Lutheran. By the grace of God, that Gospel through angel after angel, through messenger after messenger, has reached to me. When I go to bed at night, I don't stay awake worrying about my sin, because I know that Jesus has forgiven me. When troubles come, I never have to fear that God is punishing me, because Jesus bore my punishment for me. When my brother goes to war in Iraq, I don't have to fear the "what ifs", because if the almighty God who controls every action in the world decides it's time, he will be in heaven. No, I fear God, strive to give glory to his name, and worship him who made and saved me. Because I believe that by God's grace, through faith in Jesus my Savior, I am God's child. That's what it means to be a Lutheran.

So how did he do it? What was his trick? The 3rd most important man in the last 1000 years—Martin Luther. What made him so bold? What gave him such confidence? Martin Luther himself explained the secret in one of his sermons: "I simply taught, preached, and wrote God's Word; otherwise I did nothing. And while I slept or drank Wittenberg beer with my friends, the Word so greatly weakened the papacy that no prince or emperor ever inflicted such losses upon it. I did nothing; the Word did everything" (LW 51:77). "I did nothing; the Word did everything." It wasn't Martin Luther. It was the Word. That's what the Reformation is all about. Just like God promised, the eternal Gospel is still working. It's still being preached. It's not going to change. It's going to change you. The Gospel lives! Amen.

Revelation 14:6-7
Pastor Nathan Nass

Reformation Day
November 1, 2015

⁶Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people. ⁷He said in a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water."

The Gospel Lives!

Happy Reformation Day! You don't even know what to say back, do you? Maybe you're even wondering, "What's the big deal?" Everybody's thinking about Halloween, and yet us strange Lutherans try to say, "No, it's really Reformation Day." Was Martin Luther really that important? Well, in 1999, right before the turn of the millennium, A & E published a list of the 100 most important people of the last 1000 years—from 1000 to 2000 A.D. Do you think Martin Luther made it? He was #3. For some perspective... Christopher Columbus? #6. Albert Einstein? #8. George Washington? #21. The Beatles? #76. Above them all? Martin Luther—the 3rd most important person of the last 1000 years.

Why? Even non-Christians recognize that Martin Luther did something remarkable. He changed the world by standing up for God's truth. In 1500, Christianity was controlled by the one Catholic Church and its leader—the pope. And the pope had a great business going. He was funding the building of his great Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome by selling indulgences. If you paid enough money, you got a piece of paper that said you wouldn't have to suffer for your sins. Sound good?

Martin Luther didn't buy it. As a Catholic priest, he wrestled everyday with his sin and his guilt, and a piece of paper couldn't take that away. He needed more! Then he opened the Bible and found this: "*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'*" (Romans 1:17). He realized that our relationship with God doesn't depend on the pope. It depends on faith in Jesus who died for us. What a difference! That's the gospel—the "good news" about Jesus. God used Martin Luther to preach the Gospel, and with the Gospel he challenged the pope, he freed people's consciences, and he changed the world.

But then, he died. On February 18, 1546, Martin Luther died. And here's what the people must have been thinking: "It's over. It's been a great run, but it's over." Because every time God's truth is spread, there's opposition. In 1546, that opposition looked unbeatable. When the Catholic Church couldn't stop the spread of the Gospel by preaching, they amassed a huge army and marched into Germany ready to smash anyone who believed

they were saved by faith in Jesus. Couple that with the fact that Martin Luther was dead, and it looked like it was over. The Gospel had had a good run. But now it was over.

So what would you have preached at his funeral? Who are we kidding—you don't have to worry about preaching at funerals! But what was there to say? With tears in his eyes, Martin Luther's pastor read our text from Revelation: "*Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language, and people...*" And here's what he said: "The person has indeed died in Christ, but the mighty, blessed, godly doctrine of this precious man still lives most powerfully." Do you understand his point? Martin Luther had died, but the Gospel lives! It's eternal. The Reformation is not about a man. It's a message. The eternal message of salvation in Jesus. The Gospel lives!

Although, it doesn't always seem that way. As the apostle John wrote Revelation, the future for God's church didn't look good. God showed John a vision of an enormous red dragon—the devil—who is fighting against God's church (Revelation 12:3). As if that weren't bad enough, God showed John two terrifying beasts—one representing anti-Christian governments and one representing false teachers. These three enemies of the church were going to make war against God's people. It wasn't going to be easy. John must have been scared! It didn't look good! Was it over? No way! That's when the angel came flying in with the eternal Gospel of Jesus. The *eternal* Gospel for *every nation, tribe, language, and people*. Dragon? Beasts? Doesn't matter! The Gospel lives!

But it sure didn't look that way in Martin Luther's day. It seemed like the Gospel had been silenced. People were taught that your salvation depends on how holy a life you have lead. Sound scary? It should, if you've sinned! "Good," the church said. "We'll use your fear to make money—selling indulgences—to buy the forgiveness of sins." When Luther started preaching about salvation by grace through faith, here's how the Catholic Church responded: "If anyone shall say that by faith alone the impious person is justified, let him be cursed." It didn't look good! Was it over? No way! God raised up Martin Luther to proclaim the eternal Gospel of Jesus. Armies? Pope? Doesn't matter! The Gospel lives!

But today it's finally over, right? There are just too many things stacking up against God's church. At least that's often how we act and talk. Defeated. Alarmed. Afraid. We rant and worry about all sorts of different threats. We act as though Christianity is going to end. In fact, that's one of our idols. An idol is anything we put in place of God. One of our greatest idols is fear. We doubt and worry and fear more than trust in God. Do you fall into that sometimes? Fear? As if the almighty God can't handle Islam. As if the almighty God can't survive the anti-Christian sentiment in America. As if after 2000 years, God's Gospel is about to die out. Is it over?

No way! Brothers and sisters, the Gospel lives! We live in a world that wants to silence the truth of the God's Word. But it can't! True Christianity will never end. Because Jesus Christ has promised that his eternal gospel will continue to be preached to every nation, tribe, people, and language until he comes again. Don't you dare think that anyone can stop God and his Gospel! You have the everlasting God on your side with the eternal Gospel message of Jesus Christ, which "*is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes*" (Romans 1:16). Luther is dead, but the Gospel lives! Churches have closed, but the Gospel lives! That's God's promise to us his church. No one can stop his Word from being preached—not even the devil himself. The Gospel lives!

But, it's interesting what Martin Luther said about the Gospel. He said, "To be convinced in our hearts that we have forgiveness of sins and peace with God by grace alone *is the hardest thing*." It's hard to believe that we are really saved by faith in Jesus, because we live in a world where there are always strings attached. There's always a condition, right? "There's no such thing as a free lunch." "You get what you deserve." "If you want respect, earn it!" "This for that" comes as naturally to us as breathing. So you can understand how the gospel gets lost—people start to attach strings. To attach to the Gospel things that you need to do to be saved. Soon you trust more in yourself than in Jesus. Once strings are attached, it's no longer good news, but bad news.

Because there is only one person who can silence the Gospel in your life—you! Think about it. You are the only one who has the power to keep you from hearing the Gospel. The devil can't silence the Gospel in your life, but *you* can. No one in the world can keep you from hearing God's Word, but *you* can refuse to listen. You have the awful power to silence God's Word in your life. Don't do it! Don't silence the Gospel! Here's are some warning signs: How often do find yourself trusting in yourself and your abilities and how good you are? Or: How often do you find yourself disappointed with yourself and ashamed because you aren't what you and others want you to be?

That's not the way it works with God! He loves sinful and broken people, because sinful and broken people are all the people there are. When Paul wrote, "*Nothing can separate us from God's love*," he meant it! The only give and take in our relationship with God is that Jesus takes our sin and gives us his victory. He meets our failures with his forgiveness, our guilt with his grace, our messes with his mercy, our sin with his salvation. We have a no-strings-attached God. Jesus met all of God's conditions for us, so that our relationship with God is unconditional. It's based on what Jesus has done for us, not what we do or fail to do. That's the Gospel!

So there's another connection between Reformation Day and Halloween—pumpkins. Christians are like pumpkins. You are a pumpkin. God goes out and picks you out of the mud. He brings you in, and washes all the dirt off of you. Then he cuts off the top