



President Robert Bugbee

Christ Alone, Christ Forever

The 500th Anniversary Year of Luther's Reformation is here. If you're like me, you remember Reformation Sundays when preachers, articles, and bulletin covers recounted what were called the three "solos" of the Reformation: *sola gratia* (by grace alone), *sola fide* (by faith alone), and *sola Scriptura* (by Scripture alone). It was a handy way to bring to mind primary emphases in Luther's struggle and highlighted teachings which the established church of that time had forgotten.

Though not always included in that line-up of "solos," there's another one that gives a beating heart to them all: *solus Christus*, Christ alone. The other "solos" must be tied to Him, or they lose their meaning. Grace, for example, is not just general niceness on God's part by which the Lord says "Yes" to everything. God's grace, His undeserved favour toward you, is only there because of Christ. "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:23-24). It is in Christ and through Christ that God's grace works.

Faith is like that, too. Faith is not a God-pleasing trait just because you believe something really strongly, nor because it shows how sincere you are. There is faith that sincerely believes misguided things, and faith that is strongly dedicated to a cause or idea that is destructive. (Think of the kamikaze pilots who destroyed themselves in World War II, or of terrorists who strap explosives to their bodies and blow themselves up.) Instead, the faith that God counts as

great is that which lays hold of the great Redeemer He sent: Christ, Who died for the sins of the world and was raised again.

Even Scripture, inspired, inerrant, and full of wisdom as it is, will not reach its goal unless it leads you to Christ. There have been well-meaning religious people in the world who tried to turn the Bible into a book of rules and regulations which they used to justify themselves. Pharisees and law teachers did it years ago, and it's still happening here and there today. Jesus said about the Bible, "These are the Scriptures that testify about Me" (John 5:39). After He came back from the dead, the Risen Jesus made clear to two sorrowing men on their walk to Emmaus that the Scriptures ultimately are intended to point people to Him (Luke 24:13-27).

All other Reformation "solos" are aimed at bringing you back to this one: *solus Christus*. Christ alone. This is the liberating thing about our holy faith and its message of Good News. It isn't merely about concepts like "grace," which modern voices have twisted and turned into some absolute form of "acceptance" that says yes to everything, even apart from Christ. It isn't about faith which seems good just because it is sincere, regardless of what that sincerity latches on to. And our Gospel is not about allegiance to Scripture if you're turning it into nothing but a rule-book that does not drive you to Christ, even though the Bible surely includes commands from God. Our faith is not centered primarily in concepts or principles. It is riveted to God's Christ, the Rescuer Who came down from heaven and

gave His life as a ransom for many (Matthew 20:28).

St. Paul put it like this, "I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings" (Philippians 3:10). He wanted to grow closer to this Man, this God-Man, this Jesus. To be sure, it could only happen through grace, the undeserved love of God. It took place through faith, where a child of God puts personal trust in this Saviour. It all happens by means of the Word we have in Scripture. But the focal point is Christ, First and Last, Beginning and End.

The 11th Convention of our Lutheran Church-Canada will meet October 13-16, 2017, within weeks of the 500th Reformation Anniversary. It was not originally scheduled for that time, but was delayed until then because delegates to all three 2015 District conventions asked us to bring comprehensive proposals to restructure our church. This required additional preparation time. The theme for the convention is the title at the top of this page: Christ Alone, Christ Forever.

"Christ alone" is the heart of the Reformation, which Luther touched off with his 95 Theses in October 1517. "Christ forever" stresses that this is where the church's mission and your personal faith must be centered, even now. As long as the world endures, this is what Christians must be all about. And when St. John lifts the curtain and gives you a little glimpse of heaven, that's where the focus will be without end: "...to the Lamb be praise and honour and glory and power forever and ever!" (Revelation 5:13).