

Look to Christ



by Mathew Block
Editor, *The Canadian Lutheran*

“I had no love for this righteous and angry God, but secretly hated Him, and thought to myself: ‘Isn’t it enough that God has condemned us to everlasting death because of Adam’s sin and that we must suffer so much trouble and misery in this life? Over and above the terror of the law, must He increase our misery and anguish by the gospel? And by preaching the same, thunder against us His justice and fierce wrath?’”

That cry of despair is one with which many people down through the ages can sympathize. People weary of the pain and sinfulness of this world, and searching for peace, purpose, value, and acceptance. People desperate to know that God loves them. People who fear in their heart of hearts that God hates them.

These particular words were spoken by a young Augustinian monk terrified of the wrath of God. One might think that a monk of all people would be confident of God’s love. But this man was too aware of his own sin. Confronted by the enormity of God’s law and its demands, he saw only his sin. “Thou shalt not,” the Scriptures warned. But he *had*. He *had* sinned, again and again. He lived in fear that God would damn him to everlasting hell.

Thankfully, this young monk had a wiser man than he for his confessor, with whom he shared some of his fears. “You are being foolish,” the elder monk said to Martin Luther—for the young monk was indeed Luther. “God is not angry with you; you are angry with God.” When you doubt God’s love, he counseled Luther, you must look to Christ. “Look to the wounds of Jesus Christ,” he encouraged. “It

is there that you will discover the grace of God. Cast yourself into your Redeemer’s arms.”

Look to Christ. For the woman or man who doubts the love of God, there is no greater advice. For Christ is literally love incarnate. God is love, the Scriptures tell us (1 John 4:8). And Christ is the image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15). In Christ, therefore, we see God’s love enfleshed, come down to dwell among us (John 1:14).

In Christ, we see God’s will for us clearly. And it is not hate. It is not disinterest. It is love, demonstrated at the greatest of costs—the death of the Son of God Himself. It is mercy. It is Gospel, a Gospel that brings comfort for souls weary of sin and sorrow.

It took Luther time to learn this lesson aright. In fact, while we often point to the publication of the 95 Theses in 1517 as the beginning of the Reformation, Luther did not yet grasp the Gospel in its fullness at that time (*see the article on the 95 Theses on page 39.*) But as Luther continued his study of the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit would reveal to him just how deep and rich the love of God really is. In Christ—dying and rising again for him—Luther would finally find the love and mercy he was seeking.

Christ remains the answer to those seeking God’s love in our own day too. For those struggling under the demands of the law and the weight of sin, Christ is your mercy. Christ is the proof that God loves you.

We all need reminding of that sometimes. And we all have the opportunity to share the same Good News with others. Look to Christ, the confessor said to Luther, holding out the love of God to a broken man.

It is the same gift we must offer to others suffering in the ruins of this broken world.

In this issue, we consider one such group of people in particular need of the love of God: those suffering from mental illness. Such people are often ignored or shunned by today’s society—even, we must say to our shame, in the Church. We must hold out to them the mercy of Christ, even as we offer support to them in practical ways too (*see page 6*). We must say to them, as Luther’s mentor said to him, “Look to Christ.” When you doubt that God loves you, when you doubt that He cares about you in the midst of your pain, look to the One who suffered and died for you at Golgotha—the One who rose again and promises you new life in the midst of this broken one.

Look to Christ. At its core, this was the deep and abiding call of the Reformation. LCC President Robert Bugbee unpacks that message for us in his column this issue, “Christ Alone, Christ Forever” (*page 42*). That message—Christ alone—isn’t just the historic rallying cry of the reformers, he reminds us: it’s the eternal calling of every Christian in every time. For in Christ alone we find answers to our fears, comfort for our suffering, and assurance of the great and enveloping love of God.

Do you doubt? *Look to Christ.*

Reformation 2017

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