John 3:16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Today we continue our study of those great Reformation principles upon which all faith should be built. Last week we heard of that foundational principal “By Christ Alone.” We were reminded in that sermon that all the other principles are folded into and are indeed an aspect of this fact that God sent his Son to be our atoning sacrifice for sin. So it follows that you cannot think of the other four principles: By Grace Alone, To the Glory of God Alone, By Faith Alone and By Scripture Alone without thinking of Christ our Savior. To help you see this please consider these words of Luther: Luther wrote these words speaking against the false teaching that the grace of God was apart from Christ.

*Let us, therefore, be on our guard against this hellish poison and not lose Christ, the consoling Savior. Above all things, Christ must be kept in this matter of salvation. It is certainly true that, as David says (Ps 32:2) and Paul (Ro 4:8): “Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.” But St. Paul introduces the thought in order to show that this divine imputation comes only to him who believes in Christ and not to the free will of man or human nature because of good works. For he introduces Abraham in order to point out how his faith was counted to him for righteousness when he believed the divine promise concerning his Seed. Now although out of pure grace God does not impute our sins to us, He nonetheless did not want to do this until complete and ample satisfaction of His law and His righteousness had been made. The gracious imputation of which the psalm speaks had first to be bought and acquired for us from His righteousness.*

*Since, therefore, this was impossible for us, God ordained for us, in our stead, One who took upon himself all the punishment which we had deserved and fulfilled the Law for us; thus He averted the judgment of God from us and appeased his wrath. Grace, therefore, is indeed given us gratuitously. It cost us nothing, but it cost Another much to get it for us. It was purchased with an incalculable, an infinite treasure: the Son of God Himself. Therefore it is necessary, above all things, by faith to possess Him who has accomplished this for us; and it is impossible to obtain grace except through Him alone.*

Do you grasp the truth that Luther lays before us? Yes, we are saved by the grace of God! But that grace of God cannot be separated from the work of Jesus and what He has brought us. Our theme: **BY GRACE ALONE.**

In accord with the wisdom that Luther showed us, is it any wonder then that our sermon will start with that most famous of passages! John 3:16 so aptly lays out the truth of our salvation as it says, **“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believe in him shall not perish but have eternal life.** There dear people is the truth of our salvation. But perhaps as time has gone by we have failed to grasp and comprehend all that this wonderful passages says. First, note that everything took place, everything was promised and carried out because God, in this case the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, so loved the world. This love is the very nature and wonder of God. A love so pure and divine that should any of us even catch a small droplet it will bring us to a flood of tears filled with pure joy. So great, so awesome is this love of God. A love that knew what had to be done.

What had to be done is that God’s righteousness, God’s holy justice had to be dealt with. God had decreed that anyone who was not pure, perfect and holy like Him could not and would not inherit his kingdom, nor live with him in eternity. And although Adam and Eve had been created with this perfection of God, they cast it aside by choosing to believe the lie of Satan rather than the Word of God. So into this world of ours came sin. Sin devastates the world. Sin brings destruction, horror, evil and, well, name what is wrong and you will have begun to grasp the power and hellishness of sin. So God had a problem. In his righteousness He had decreed that the sinner should die….die eternally…that meant the world, now filled with sin and a part of sin, would perish. Yet what does our verse say? **“God so loved the world.”** God loved us in spite of our sin. God desired to save the world. How? **“He gave his one and only Son!”**

You, of course, grasp and know what it is that Jesus came to do. Jesus went to the cross to satisfy completely the righteous judgment of His Father (and himself too). Jesus paid for our sins by enduring eternal hell for our trespasses. He died the eternal death we deserve. Yes, Jesus gave of himself for us. Came to save. Came to do the Father’s bidding. Came to make God’s grace, God’s unending love a part of our lives.

Did you catch that truth revealed in our OT reading? In Jeremiah we heard of the new covenant that was to be. A covenant where everything would be clear and true. Verse 34 said, **“No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,’ declares the Lord. ‘For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”** Those words are about the time and work of Jesus. A man will not have to teach his neighbor or brother about the Lord, about who and what the Lord is. Because they will know the Lord. In other words, Jesus will walk among them, teach among them and even die among them. But most important, Jesus will be raised from the dead among them. Want to know the Lord? Then know Jesus! He is the fullness of the deity in bodily form. He is one with the Father and to know Jesus is to know the Father. The end result of what Jesus will do is summed up in that last sentence, declaring what Jesus will bring: **“For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”** That’s Jesus’ work. That’s Jesus bringing to us the very grace of God. That God, even in his perfect justice and righteousness that demands sin be paid for, can love us, can pour his grace upon us because His Son Jesus paid the price for our sins, satisfied his perfect justice and righteousness.

So it is true! God sent his Son Jesus **“to save the world.”** Faith in Jesus means there is no condemnation for our sins. Faith in Jesus means that we are not afraid of the light or the truth of God. Because in Jesus we grasp this awesome and wonderful gift of grace.

Well, obviously we can’t talk of this grace without referencing our Epistle lesson, can we? Ephesians 2:1-10 **“As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.”** Do you grasp that all of these words are there to show us our very nature, to show us what we are without Jesus, without the Light of this world and his truth? Note how that last sentence spoke…**”we were by nature objects of wrath.”** No Jesus, no salvation and life. But our Epistle goes on….

**“But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”**

There is the wonder and marvel of Jesus fully laid out. We were totally lost in sin, dead in transgressions. Let me remind you of why we are defined this way. Dead people do nothing. There are capable of nothing. They can’t make decisions, can’t accept anything, can’t do diddly-squat! That is what we are without Christ. Dead.

Our passage tells us that in Christ we have been made alive! We did not decide this or have any active part in this. God, because of his love for us, yes, his grace, made us alive. God raised us up in Christ and gives us eternal life. God showered his kindness on us, God opened his kingdom to us, yes, God did and accomplished everything necessary for our salvation because of his love. All of this in Jesus. All of this so that His grace could be applied to us, so that his perfect justice and righteousness could be appeased, so that atonement could be made. And that is why we can say, **“It is by grace you have been saved, through faith.”**

Grace is ours because we have faith in Jesus. Note what is said, even this faith is a gift of God. Faith is not what we choose, not what we determine or accept into our hearts. Faith is a gift of God, given us the by Holy Spirit through the means of grace. Faith is that gift of God that causes us to cling to Jesus, to be filled with awe and wonder that God and His Son should so care for us. Everything necessary for our salvation is provided and given by God! That is grace.

From this point on all else is handled and granted by God. Notice that even our good works are the result of God acting in us. I know, that just seems way to easy, to give God all the credit? But even our gospel text ended this way, **“But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.”** Your life, your salvation, your good works, your being a child of God, your….well, your everything…Jesus says it is seen plainly that what you have done has been done through God.

Over the years I have had numerous members, especially those that might be facing death ask, “Pastor, how do I know I’ve been good enough to get to heaven?” My response has always been the same. “You haven’t! You are not even close! But Jesus has for you! That’s what our faith is all about.”

Dear people, what a marvel this wonder of God is. We are saved by grace. We don’t have to worry if we are good enough or smart enough or faithful enough or anything enough. When our focus is on Jesus, we have everything done in Jesus. Our salvation is sure and certain because it is by grace alone. God’s grace is ours in Jesus. Thank you Lord, for giving us back this very Scriptural truth. Amen.