"**Executor of Forgiveness**"

Based on [Romans 3:19-28](http://biblia.com/books/esv/Ro3.19-28) and [John 8:31-36](http://biblia.com/books/esv/Jn8.31)

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Reformation Sunday

By Pastor Nathan Fuehrer

Fred Jones--husband and father--died. And so his family...his wife, his daughter and two sons and the executor are all present, as the Lawyer reads the will. "**So**", the Lawyer says to them, "**Jimmy, your dad wanted you to take the Beverly Hills houses**." "**Becky, you get the apartments over in Los Angeles Plaza.**" "**Junior, you were chosen to take the offices over in City Center.**" "**Mrs. Jones, you will be pleased to take all the residential buildings downtown**."

The executor is Fred's trustworthy nephew. He has to make sure the property is distributed according to the will, and he is in shock, "**Mrs. Jones, Fred must have been such a hard working man to have accumulated all this property...much wealthier than I thought.**

Mrs. Jones replies, "**Property? The bum has a paper route.**"

2000 years ago, Jesus Christ died on the cross, and the night before that, he announced his last will and testament. A new testament. At his Last Supper, He said to his disciples that the next day he would be sacrificed as a ransom for sin. And his blood would pay for the sin of the whole world, believers and unbelievers alike, children of God and children of the devil alike, his blood would pay for their sins. And as he paid for the sins of all, the faithful and the faithless, our Romans reading today points out that the sacrifice of his blood will only be received by faith.

**The wages of sin is death** (Romans 6:23). **There is no forgiveness without the shedding of blood** (Hebrews 9:22). And Jesus' blood payment would accrue enough capital to pay off the sin of 1000 worlds, more than enough for ours. But on that night that he was betrayed, he announced his last will and testament, and he made his disciples...the "church", the executors of his estate, an estate of unlimited forgiveness, life, and salvation.

Jesus built his church to be his executor. And it's an executor's job to see that the estate is distributed according to the will of the deceased. Jesus named his church his executor many times in his will. When he said to his disciples "**whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven**", and "", "**Anyone who hears you hears me, and anyone who rejects you rejects me"**, "**If *you* forgive anyone their sins they are forgiven, if you retain them they are retained**." Scripture alone tells us that the church is supposed to draw from the estate of Jesus to forgive sins.

It is Jesus "last will and testament" that the church continues to be the executor and trustee of his estate. But a will names not only the executor, but the beneficiaries. The beneficiaries named in Jesus' last will and testament are ***those who repent***. Ladies and gentlemen, Jesus didn't give his church his "estate of forgiveness" to do with it whatever they want. He gave specific instructions. He said, "**If your brother sins, rebuke him; *if he repents,* forgive him.**" He said in Holy Communion, "**This is my body and blood, Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins, DO THIS in remembrance of me**", He said, "**Baptize in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit** And so forgiveness is doled out to repentant hearts, in his Word and his sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion.

And so, on Reformation Sunday, we recall how five-hundred years ago, the pope and cardinals of the church were ignoring Jesus' last will and testament. They were behaving as though they were not *just* the executors and trustees of Jesus' estate. They were behaving as if they were the ***owners*** of it. And as the primary shareholder of the church, the pope began to behave as though he could dole out forgiveness however he saw fit. And so he began to prescribe new ways of distributing Jesus' forgiveness called "**indulgences**." He would say, "**Yes be baptized and take communion and all that, but if you want "*extra forgiveness*" from Jesus...I'm your guy. Tell you what, if you make a pilgrimage to Rome, or if you look at special relics, or if you buy this certificate signed by me...I will hand out even more of Jesus' forgiveness**."

The church was adding indulgences to Jesus last will and testament--new "means of grace" and "means of forgiveness" that He never authorized. **And this kindled the wrath of God who sent Martin Luther and other men and women faithful to the written will of Jesus, (that is, the bible), to spark a reformation in the church, the Reformation we recognize and celebrate today.** God sent the reformation so that the church would stop behaving as though it was the owner of forgiveness, and instead would return to its role as an honest executor and trustee of Jesus estate.

You might think this is just a 500 year old controversy that's been long since dead in the water. **And yet this summer, the new Pope Francis was offering indulgences, that is temporal forgiveness, for those who would subscribe to certain of his "tweets."** The Roman Catholic Church still teaches that it has the power to make up **new ways** to distribute and access Jesus' estate, that is, his forgiveness; and claim to be not just the executor, but the editor of his will and testament.

And so every year we celebrate Reformation day, **to celebrate the faithful remnant who called out the church in her error, and were cut off because of it**. And yet, there is a down side to it. Because of the Reformation, we now have thousands of different Christian denominations today, branching off and making the vine of the church into a doctrinal thornbush. These other denominations are called "Protestant."

If the Roman Catholic church fell off of one side of the horse; Protestant Christianity falls off of the other. Protestantism behaves as though Jesus left no executor to his will at all, no trustee to distribute his estate forgiveness according to his will. **Protestantism behaves as though Jesus drafted a will, and left his children to fight over it themselves.** Can you imagine the chaos that would happen if a rich person left a will without naming an executor? Every beneficiary would read the will in a way that suits themselves, and they would ignore parts of it that didn't. Can you imagine what would happen if a rich person left a trust without a trustee to distribute it? The beneficiary would claim the whole thing right away, take it for granted and squander it.

Ladies and Gentlemen, now can you see the situation Christianity is in today...**Why there seems to be more denominations than there are Christians?** It's because Protestantism has made every *beneficiary* of Christ their own executor and trustee of God's forgiveness, and every Christian a church unto himself. And you know that if you don't name an executor, the family will fight over who really deserves the inheritance it and each person will put their own interests first.

Jesus says to his church, "**If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free**." And that's the gospel...not that Jesus set you free from the church, he set you free by his forgiveness won on the cross and distributed to you by the church, which he named the executor of forgiveness. His church...not a building or an institution, but all believers in Jesus Christ, who gather to receive him in Word and Sacrament.

This is the "church," and the gates of hell will not prevail against it as it binds and looses sinners in Jesus name. Can the church mess it up?...of course. But that's why Jesus promises that when his church acts, he acts. He gives the church a paper route to deliver forgiveness...and he will be sure never to lose you because of any human error. For He *is* the church; the church is *His* Body, executing *his* will because he can. He is, after all, risen and alive. **And if his right arm causes him to sin he will cut it off, reform it, bring it back--even if only a remnant--**to make sure his forgiveness is given to you, faithful people, who are ever eager to receive his "estate of forgiveness" by faith.