**Justified by Faith**

Based on [Romans 3:19-28](http://biblia.com/books/esv/Ro3.19-28)

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Reformation Sunday

By Pastor Nathan Fuehrer

I just returned from a Pastor’s Conference up north, west of Red Deer. One of the topics discussed is how the landscape of Lutheranism across Canada and the US is changing. The ELCIC has lost many members due to their stance on the word of God, and many have come over to our own LCC. But there is also the CALC and the LCMC who have grown since last summer, and also the NALC has come forward as well. The WELS hasn’t seen much growth as I understand and neither has the LB. So there you have it…Lutheranism in North America. The ELCIC, LCC, CALC, LCMC, WELS, and LB…oh and the new one, the NALC. If you can keep them straight, you’ll have a good sense of the Contemporary Lutheran Landscape…and if you try to list them for your friends, they’ll think you’re preparing for a spelling bee.

Isn’t that sad? I’ve listed seven different church bodies in Canada that seriously disagree on some topic…seriously enough to divide over, and I haven’t even left the confines of the Lutheran Church. There’s Baptists…Reformed Baptists, Southern Baptists. There’s Pentecostal Churches, Unitarian Pentecostals. There’s the Reformed, there’s Roman Catholic, Seventh-day Adventist, Methodist, Presbyterian, UCC, Anglican and I’ve only gotten started. All this to choose from, and you people just want to worship God.

According to Christianity Today, there are reported to be approximately 41,000 Christian Denominations…great and small…41,000. And today we recognize, we celebrate the event that lead to it all. The Reformation. Prior to the Reformation, virtually all of western Christianity was Roman Catholic. And then on October 31st, 1517, an Augustinian Monk named Martin Luther nailed 95 Theses, 95 points of debate to the Church Door in Wittenberg, Germany…a door that served as kind of a bulletin board. And so began a Reformation that turned 1 Church into the 41,000 church denominations we have today, minus the churches of Eastern Christianity…but that’s another story. So Martin Luther…was it worth it?

Have you ever been travelling somewhere and missed your turn? Of course you have. Missing your turn is only one mistake, but it has huge consequences. If you leave here today and you need to get to the south side, but you miss the turn to whoop up drive, that’s just one mistake. Is it okay to say, “Well that’s only one mistake, I won’t make any more mistakes”, and keep on the same road? No, you’ll end up in picture butte and you’ll miss your dinner. It may be a hassle, but the only thing to do is turn around and go back.

That’s the reformation. The church missed it’s turn and as a result was headed in the wrong direction. Luther was saying to the pope, “**Turn this thing around, you missed your exit**” and so the pope kicked him to the curb to hoof it back to the right road. But you gotta admit, it’s better to be walking in the right direction, than driving in the wrong one.

And in our Epistle reading, St. Paul sets the record straight about where the church is supposed to be heading. And it has to do with how you view your role in salvation. And here’s the question…why does God tell you what to do and what not to do. Why did God give us his Law, his 10 commandments, his “Thou shalls” and “Thou shalt nots”? Is it so that we can use them to get in to heaven? Does he tell us to obey our father and our mother so that we will obey our father and our mother? Does he tell us not to covet so that we won’t covet? Does god tell you to love your neighbor so that you will love your neighbor?

No. If I don’t love my parents, will hearing the words “God says, “You should obey your parents” make you do it? You might go through the motions, but your heart won’t be in it. If you want to sleep with your neighbor’s wife, and then you hear God say, “**Don’t commit adultery**”, will that law make the lust in your heart go away? No. You might not act on the lust, but it won’t make the lust go away. So then, what good is it to hear God’s law?

St. Paul tells us. He says, **“Through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.”** Isn’t that remarkable! In other words, when God tells us what to do and what not to do, the main reason he speaks is to shut us down. He isn’t telling us how we can be saved, he’s showing us our sin. Hearing his commandments doesn’t make us love God, only fear his wrath.

“**Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped and the whole world may be held accountable**.” Did you hear that? God speaks the law so that our mouths may be stopped. God speaks his law so that we will shut up, stop making excuses, stop thinking that we can be his equal, so that we can stop boasting about our accomplishments. Instead, we are fallen creatures, in his debt and at his mercy.

And that, dear friends in Christ, is where the true Gospel comes in. The good news that, though God has every reason to cast you away because of the Law, he gathers you to himself because of faith in Jesus Christ. If a church misses that turn Ladies and Gentlemen, it’s on the road to perdition.

Ladies and Gentlemen, having 41,000 different churches is sad, but it’s not nearly as sad as having only 1 church that’s on the wrong road. That was the dilemma, and Martin Luther knew it, and he chose the 1 Truth, even if it split the church. He chose the truth of the Bible over the truth of the church. The church was teaching that God gave us his Law to make us saints; but St Paul says he gave us his law to make us sinners. Did Martin Luther regret his role in the Reformation? Not at all. In fact, he did exactly what Jesus told him to do. In our Gospel lesson, Jesus says, “**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 the truth is that you are justified by faith in Christ, apart from works of the law. You fail God’s law and deserve to die; Jesus kept God’s law and deserved to live and by faith in Him, we get what He deserves, because He got what we deserve.

Therefore friends, don’t let anyone make you anxious with the law without showing you the Gospel. Don’t let anyone tell you you can save yourself by keeping the Law. Christ kept the law and you keep Christ by faith. And on the Last Day when you see God face to face in Glory, you can stand before him unashamed because Christ stands in your place by faith.