**Sermon Reformation Sunday**

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**Cypress Lutheran Parish**

**Text:** *For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus… (Romans 3:21-27)*

At last, by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, I gave heed to the context of the words, namely, “In it the righteousness of God is revealed, as it is written, ‘He who through faith is righteous shall live.’” There I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith. And this is the meaning: the righteousness of God is revealed by the gospel, namely, the passive righteousness with which merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, “He who through faith is righteous shall live.” Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates.

These are the words of Bl. Martin Luther, written a year before his death in 1546, in comment on our Epistle reading for this Reformation Sunday.

In the *Bondage of the Will*, Luther deals with the reality that: “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23). In this passage, the “glory of God” St. Paul speaks of is not some transcendental, some fixed amount of glory the Creator radiates from his essence. God is certainly glorified just as his name is hallowed in itself. There is no way we could fall short of that glory. The falling short comes on our end as lost and sinful creatures; the “glory of God” here spoken of is the glory which he rightly expects to be given by us. In a word: it is passive glory. He is meant to be glorified by us, just as his name is to be hallowed among us also by living and teaching according to the truth and purity of God’s Word. But anyone who fails to do this profanes the name of God among us, and he is thus robbed of the glory due him. No living person can claim to have lived a perfect life free from sin. There is no room for distinction.

But this is not all bad news. Not at all. This awareness of our lost and sinful condition prepares us for the good news that is in Christ Jesus alone. The glory of God is a passive glory; and this means that, in the preceding verse of our Epistle, the righteousness of God is also a passive righteousness. “And,” as Paul writes, all “are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to b received by faith.” (v. 24) The “righteousness of God” is not a standard to which we are held accountable, a bar to be reached by us. In this passage, it is the righteousness which God gives to us quite apart from our desserts. Those who are confident in their own efforts to gain heaven – or make heaven on earth – meet an intolerable blow, an offense; “then what comes of boasting? It is excluded.” (v. 27) It is only good news to those who are horrified by their sins, regarding them as very serious, and those who look for joy and comfort in Christ alone. Through him we are saved. “For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.” (Col 1:20)

Stop, therefore, trying to justify your past mistakes and sins. And whatever you may hold against your neighbour – remember God’s bountiful dealings with you in Jesus Christ. He surrendered his glory, bled and died on the cross, to give you his own righteousness. “All glory to His merit. O triune God in heav’n above, You have revealed Your saving love; Your blessed name we hallow.”