

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
[www.lutheranlccf.org](http://www.lutheranlccf.org)  
**Reformation Sunday, October 31, 2010**

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Hymns: 262, 283, 375, 370, 385:1  
Lessons: Zechariah 12:10, Romans 4:4-13, John 1:14-17.  
Sermon Text: Ephesians 2:8-9.  
Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Imagine you have this tremendous gift you want to give to someone. It is something that will change their lives. It isn't just money, it isn't just possessions. It isn't just things. It is your love.

How do you give it to someone? How do you give it to as many people as possible, even if they don't deserve it? You would have to find some means of giving this gift to as many people as possible.

Well, God has such a gift for you. He wants to give you an eternity of happiness, true happiness. He wants to give you an unending life with no pain, no bad emotions, nothing to distract you from the happiness, the joy he wants you to enjoy. He wants to give you heaven.

But you don't deserve it. You know that you sin daily and much, in thoughts, words, and deeds. But despite your undeserving sinful nature, God tells you today again that

**YOU HAVE BEEN SAVED BY GRACE**

- 1. This is yours through faith in Jesus Christ.**
- 2. It is the gift of God, not because of any good works you have done.**

You are now invited to join in singing hymn 373, (The Lutheran Hymnal, melody "O dass ich tausend") stanzas 1 and 2: "By grace I'm saved, grace free and boundless."

**1. By grace I'm saved, grace free and boundless;  
My soul, believe and doubt it not.  
Why stagger at this word of promise?  
Hath Scripture ever falsehood taught?  
Nay; then this word must true remain;  
By grace thou, too, shalt heav'n obtain.**

**2. By grace! None dare lay claim to merit;  
Our works and conduct have no worth.  
God in His love sent our Redeemer,  
Christ Jesus, to this sinful earth;  
His death did for our sins atone,  
And we are saved by grace alone.**

Those hymn verses, plainly based on the Word of God, tell you that you shall obtain heaven through grace. And grace? That's a word that means God's undeserved love, his undeserved goodness and mercy.

This grace that Scripture speaks of "*is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.*" Scripture, God's Word is true. We can't earn heaven by our works and conduct. On October 31 in 1517 Martin Luther, a teacher of theology in Wittenberg, Germany, posted an invitation in Latin on the door of the castle church to debate 95 points about indulgences, a common practice of the church in his day. There was only one church, the church we call the Roman Catholic Church. He had obviously studied indulgences and the Holy Scriptures that talk about forgiveness of sins to come up with 95 points to debate. If you read these 95 theses you will see that there are many things about the papacy and the Roman Catholic teachings that Luther did not challenge until

later. But at this time he was concerned about the doctrines and practices that taught and claimed that you could get relief from your sins by buying pieces of paper saying your penalties for sin were removed. In addition, a most common practice was the buying of masses to be said for dead relatives to hasten their way out of purgatory, a fictitious place in which you would finally be cleansed or purged of your sins before your final admission to heaven. This practice was a tremendous money-maker for the churches, too.

So Martin Luther started to open the Scriptures to people who thought that they had to earn heaven either by their works and conduct or by buying their way into heaven.

He was oppressed by his sins and couldn't do enough, couldn't pray enough, couldn't torture his body enough to remove the weight of sin. Satan kept harping at his heart trying to tell him that he wasn't good enough to earn heaven. And he wasn't. No one is. But God's grace was given to mankind because Jesus Christ, God's very own Son came down from heaven, suffered, died, and rose again from the dead to conquer Satan. He was good enough to earn heaven – for all mankind, so that all who believe will inherit heaven!

Let's sing about that as we join in singing hymn 373, stanzas 3-4.

**3. By grace! Oh, mark this word of promise  
When thou art by thy sins opprest,  
When Satan plagues thy troubled conscience,  
And when thy heart is seeking rest.  
What reason cannot comprehend  
God by His grace to thee doth send.**

**4. By grace God's Son, our only Savior,  
Came down to earth to bear our sin.  
Was it because of thine own merit  
That Jesus died thy soul to win?  
Nay, it was grace, and grace alone,  
That brought Him from His heavenly throne.**

Isn't logical, according to human reason, that God would save us in this way. Humans generally want free stuff, but when it comes to eternal salvation, mankind somehow thinks he must and wants to earn it. Such work-righteousness is totally excluded by God's grace.

In some of our recent sermons we have talked about the present blessings that the Ephesian believers and we already enjoy, and the even greater riches we by faith may confidently anticipate in heaven. Here we see the source and cause of all this blessedness. It is God's grace. It is God's undeserved gift to mankind.

It is an undeserved gift that through faith you have been saved, for God gave you saving faith as a gift.

Imagine that someone has given you a bag of gold coins. Wow, you think, that would be really valuable. Faith has been compared to the hand that holds that bag of gold. That faith can be a strong, youthful hand. It could be an old weak hand. But the one who gives you the gold helps close your fingers around the bag, and makes sure you are holding it tight, regardless of the strength that you have to hold that bag.

By definition faith is trust and confidence that take God at his Word. But remember that all people are by nature dead in transgressions and sins. They can't bring themselves to faith. They can't decide to trust God's promises and accept Christ as their Savior by themselves.

This important truth is pounded home with three unmistakably clear statements Paul tells the Ephesians – and us – and anyone who will hear – that their conversion is 1) not from themselves 2) the gift of God and 3) not by works, not because of works. The Word of God leaves absolutely no doubt that the sinner's conversion is God's doing, not something I have done. As a result, **"no one can boast"** as though he had done something to save himself or that his works in any way contributed to his salvation. Salvation is by grace, an undeserved gift freely given by God without the contribution of any human works.

The Word of God in Hebrews 11:1 tells us **"Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see."** The grace and the faith to accept that grace both come from God. Let's talk for a moment about faith. Let me use some earthly, secular examples of faith. You have faith in money. Let me explain. A piece of paper with green and black – and sometimes some other colors of ink has value, not because it is

valuable in itself, but because people around the world have faith in it. Everyone who accepts this in payment for something has faith that he or she can turn around and use it in payment for something else. That's one example of faith.

People usually have faith that bridges they drive over will not collapse but will hold them. We never even thought much about bridges until August 1, 2007, when an interstate highway bridge collapsed in Minneapolis, killing 13 and injuring 145 people. Sometimes faith in the safety of bridges is misplaced. Of course, we have been assured that the bridges we drive on are safe. But we have to have faith in the people who are telling us that. It is not my intention to shake your faith in the safety of the bridges you drive on, but I have used that picture to help explain what faith is.

It is my intention to assure you from the Word of God today that you can safely have faith in God, and in Jesus Christ as your Savior from all your sins.

Let's sing about that as we join in singing hymn 373, stanzas 5-6.

**5. By grace! This ground of faith is certain;  
So long as God is true, it stands.  
What saints have penned by inspiration,  
What in His Word our God commands,  
What our whole faith must rest upon,  
Is Grace alone, grace in His Son.**

**6. By grace to timid hearts that tremble,  
In tribulation's furnace tried,--  
By grace, despite all fear and trouble,  
The Father's heart is open wide.  
Where could I help and strength secure  
If grace were not my anchor sure?**

Grace is the ground of faith, the foundation for faith. Our faith rests on the truthfulness of God, as recorded in his Holy Word, the Bible. Our faith can rest on nothing but Jesus' blood and righteousness. We can trust our heavenly Father.

And that is a good thing. Martin Luther, before he learned the importance and meaning of this passage, was terrified that he had not done enough good works to save him from the punishment of hell that he deserved because of all his sins.

It is plain from Scripture that good works don't save us. God's grace saves us by simply believing in it. A life of good works is, however, what God has in mind for every Christian. It is a part of that creative, life-giving process that God set in motion when in his kindness he called us to faith in his son. The Word of God indicates the place of works when it says, "***For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.***" Ephesians 2:10. This will be our next sermon.

May this foundation of the Reformation – YOU HAVE BEEN SAVED BY GRACE – be the foundation of your life each day: "***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.***" Amen.

May the peace of God which we have by grace, through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ sustain us until we are with Jesus in heaven. Amen.

Instead of the offertory today, please join in singing hymn 373 stanza 7.

**7. By grace! On this I'll rest when dying;  
In Jesus' promise I rejoice;  
For though I know my heart's condition,  
I also know my Savior's voice.  
My heart is glad, all grief has flown,  
Since I am saved by grace alone. Amen.**