

Reformation Day - Romans 3:21-28; 30.10.2016

Being made right in God's sight

[²¹ But now God has shown us a way to be made right with him without keeping the requirements of the law, as was promised in the writings of Moses and the prophets long ago.] ²² We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are.

²³ For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. ²⁴ Yet God, with undeserved kindness, declares that we are righteous. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins. ²⁵ For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood. [This sacrifice shows that God was being fair when he held back and did not punish those who sinned in times past, ²⁶ for he was looking ahead and including them in what he would do in this present time. God did this to demonstrate his righteousness, for he himself is fair and just, and he declares sinners to be right in his sight when they believe in Jesus.]

²⁷ Can we boast, then, that we have done anything to be accepted by God? No, because our acquittal is not based on obeying the law. It is based on faith. ²⁸ So we are made right with God through faith and not by obeying the law. [NLT]

In a year's time there will be massive celebrations in many areas of the world to commemorate 500 years since the Reformation. The question is, what will the fact of the reformation mean then, and what does it mean for us today, 499 years after it is claimed that Luther made his theses known?

What it could have meant, was the purpose of a movement called *Ablaze*, launched by the LC-MS slightly more than 10 years ago. This movement had the aim of reaching 100 million people with the saving message of the Gospel by 31st October 2017. This aim was to be achieved by the help of partner churches all over the globe, and a lot of material was prepared to help achieve this purpose. We also conducted Bible-study and other sessions to prepare ourselves for this noble effort of commemorating 500 years of Reformation by sharing the message of

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with people where we live and work.

Due to a change in the leadership of the LC-MS *Ablaze* unfortunately had cold water poured over it, and it rather quickly went under, and was forgotten. Unfortunately we too forgot and all too easily forget that we have wonderful news to share with people - not simply to achieve a goal, but because they are lost without the message of God's saving grace.

There are doctors who go out to neighbouring countries to help people with their physical needs - to give of their time and expertise for no charge, so that others may be able to live better lives. God's purpose is not only that people have better lives in terms of their physical needs, but especially also so that they have real life - life with God. So that this may happen they need to be shown how they too can be *made right in God's sight*.

That is where we come in - and we don't have to travel to foreign destinations to do this. As we prepare for the 500th commemoration of Reformation, what better way to do it, than to be an advertisement for what God has done to make it possible for us to live in his presence again.

How are we put right with God again? How are we made righteous? This question was at the very heart of the reformation movement. Luther had tried to become acceptable to God by following the practises of his church at that time. These practices included not only confessing regularly, and carrying out the penances he was given. Like Paul Luther was a bit of an extremist, as his conscience plagued him, so he practised fasting and self-flagellation (whipping himself). He would sleep next to his bunk (which did not have a posture-pedic mattress) - in fact he tortured himself to such an extent that he damaged his health. But in spite of all his efforts, he did not find the peace he sought of being acceptable to God.

Luther found the peace he sought as he studied the Word of God - and it is said that it was as he studied the passage we have just heard, that he stumbled on the answer that **we are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ**. This answer challenged all he had learnt, all he had practised - and was over a period of time that he gradually came to the point where he could not keep this

newly found message of God's grace to himself. In his lectures, and in his practise as a priest he made this message the centre of what he taught, that **God, with undeserved kindness, declares that we are righteous. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins. For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood.**

Knowing how we can be put right with God again - and not speaking about it. To Luther that would have been like discovering a cure for HIV/AIDS or for cancer, and not sharing it with anyone outside a select group of people. The treatment regimen for cancer can be extremely debilitating - and yet we encourage those going through this course of treatment not to stop, because there is the hope of being healed.

What has happened to the message of being made right with God again in our time? What we see and hear so often is some fuzzy message that God loves you - and so everything is OK.

Of course God loves you! - and that is why he could not leave you the way you were! God's purpose for the coming of Christ into our world was that we will be made right in his sight by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. We are to accept that Jesus Christ came into this world - that he lived, suffered, died and was raised from the dead again, so that you and I could be saved from a life separate from God.

If anyone is to have the life God promises - if anyone is to be healed of the ravages of sin in their life -, they have to commit to having their lives reformed. That is not always as easy as it may sound. It involves turning our lives around - of learning to trust in God's cure for the disease of sin, and not what anyone else may say or in what we may do.

So, God's aim for us as we commemorate Reformation is not to just remember what happened back then, but to understand what needs to happen today: to firmly believe that we are made right in God's sight, by trusting that Jesus' death on the cross and his having been raised to new life truly happened for me, for you and for all people. To believe that to have this life, we need to turn

away from things which might harm us - and that it is not public opinion which shows us what might be harmful, but God's Word, and only this Word of God.

Being changed by this message, and setting the world ablaze with it, is not something we can do on our own. To start a blaze one needs air - in this case the 'wind' of the Holy Spirit. What halted the progress of the *Ablaze* movement is not for us to say - but we know that we can't change ourselves or others without the 'blowing' of the Holy Spirit on our lives to kindle the spark which has been lit. What is important, is that we are where the Holy Spirit is at work - that we submit our lives, our thinking and planning to him. What is important is that we don't allow disappointments to extinguish the flame God has brought to bear in us - and that we don't allow the thinking of our time to pour water over this flame of our faith.

As we allow God's light to illuminate our lives, we become a lamp to shine God's grace on our world - on the people we meet with.

So, commemorating Reformation has the purpose for us, to remember the spark that has been lit in us, that God has nurtured and brought to blaze in our lives over and over. He has promised to bring this work to completion in us - not to allow the fire of his love and forgiveness to be extinguished in our lives. As his light shines on us, we are to let it shine through us also - lighting up the world with God's grace and peace.