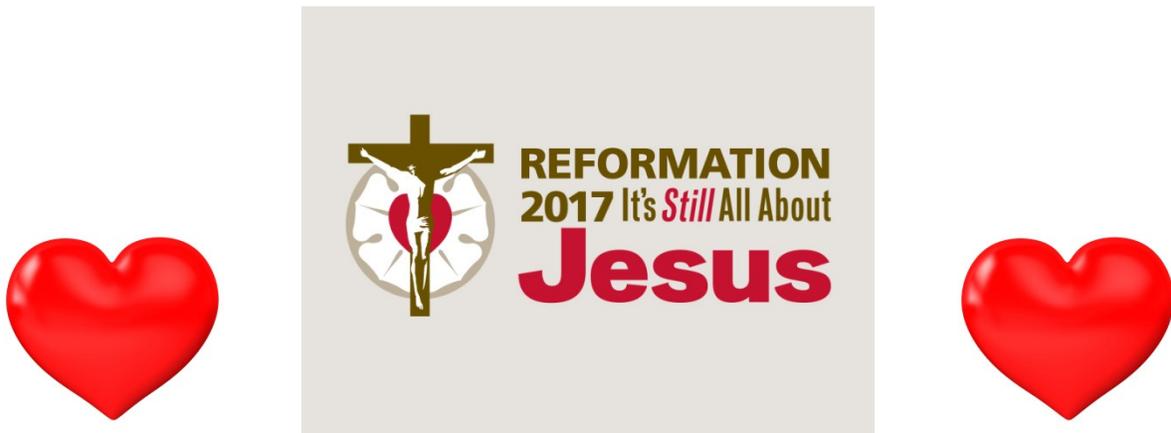


Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Greetings from the parsonage! Is spring here already? We've had some warmer weather, but it is still officially winter. That said, it's still nice to look out my window and see the sun shining on green ground. This month, the month to which I currently look forward as I write this article in January, we celebrate Valentine's Day. This holiday was set apart as a celebration for a saint who was martyred in the faith. Not much is known about him for certain, and it may be that there were actually two saints of the same name whose accounts became intermingled over time—yet either way, we can see simply from the fact that he was martyred that he lived a life of love. After all, we who have been loved by God our Father in His Son Jesus Christ cannot help but love others. “We love because he first loved us (1 John 4:19).” Let's learn more about that love as we conclude the section on the First Article in Luther's Large Catechism.



We left off last month learning how we swagger about and act arrogantly if we do not recognize that all things come from God and give Him thanks for them. Luther continues: “For this reason we ought daily to practice this article, impress it upon our minds, and remember it in everything we see and in every blessing that comes our way. Whenever we escape distress or danger, we should recognize how God gives and does all of this so that we may sense and see in them his fatherly heart and his boundless love toward us (BoC, p. 433).”

Even though I know, and can and do teach that all of creation is a means of natural knowledge for knowing that God exists, I fail to practice the First Article every day as Luther and indeed this article demands. How often do I walk by the trees in their various stages of life from sapling to losing their leaves every autumn, but my mind is too preoccupied with the worries and concerns of life? As if I could add a single hour to my life! (Matt. 6:25-34) And last week I hit a raccoon on the St. Peter blacktop. That got me thinking how long I've had my car without having damage done to it by accidentally hitting the occasional critter or other incidents. I realized that I've had my car for around five years—and what is more, I've never had any animal disrupt the bottom of a vehicle I was driving for any of the sixteen plus years I've been driving. Yet did I think of that every day and give God thanks for it every day? No. What a poor, miserable sinner I am! And if you are being hit with the Law as I was, what poor, miserable sinners we are!

But thanks be to God that He does all this not out of rewarding us for being so good, but out of His “fatherly heart.” For the sake of His Son, Jesus Christ—who lived, was crucified, suffered hell, descended into hell, rose from the dead, and ascended—God looks at you and me as His dear children. He no longer sees our sins, even the sins of not giving thanks to Him as often as we should. And this just gives us all that much more reason to thank Him every day.

This month, whether you are single, dating, engaged, married, or widowed, remember that you are still loved. You are loved by God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. You are loved with so much love that you cannot help but love others, just like St. Valentine did, even as he was martyred in this great faith of love, the love of God in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Your brother and under-Shepherd in Christ,

Pastor Josh