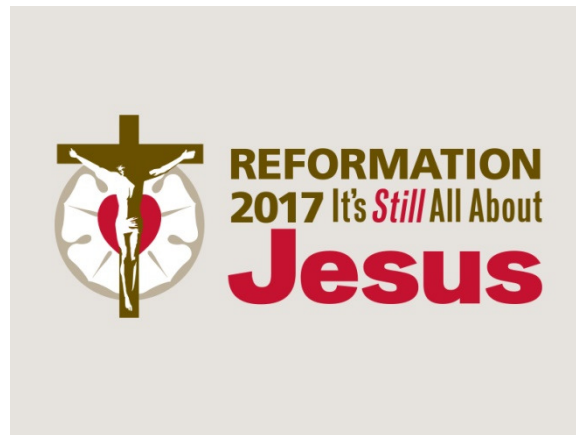


Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Greetings from the parsonage! I hope and pray that each of you had a blessed Christmas celebration with your friends and family last month. I was able to have not only my mom and dad but also my girlfriend spend a few days with me—in a different bedroom than me (and yes, with the acknowledgment and permission of the elders). We had a gift exchange and each received things we had hoped to get, as well as a few surprises. I hope you were able to have the same! And I hope that you had a blessed and wonderful New Year's Eve and entrance into 2107. With these things in mind, we renew our study of Luther's Large Catechism, continuing through his discussion of the First Article.



Last month we heard how God wards off all sorts of dangers for us on behalf of His Son, our Savior, the babe in the manger, Jesus Christ. Luther picks up: “Here much could be said if we were to describe how few people believe this article. We pass it over; we hear it and recite it, but we neither see nor think about what the words command us to do. For if we believed with our whole heart, we would also act accordingly, and not swagger about and boast and brag as if we had life, riches, power, honor, and such things of ourselves, as if we ourselves were to be feared and served. This is the way the wretched, perverse world acts, drowned in its own

blindness, misusing all the blessings and gifts of God solely for its own pride, greed, pleasure, and enjoyment, never once turning to God to thank him or acknowledge him as Lord or Creator (BoC, p.433).”

So, are any of you getting pangs of conscience because you didn't thank God, your Lord, Creator, and Savior, for the gifts you received at Christmas? And again, you have received not only the gifts you got at Christmas, but even entrance into this very year. Have you thanked God for that?

Whether we like to hear it or not, when we are not thankful to God for all that He has done for us, it is to Him as though we were boasting and swaggering as though we don't need Him. We are either thankful, or we are not. We either put Him first, or we don't. There is no middle ground—according to the Law.

But isn't that what this particular New Year reminds us of? That there is a middle ground: namely, grace, in and through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He stands upon that middle ground between us and God, mediating for us—for you—so that you might be forgiven by God and brought into life everlasting. Again, this is by grace. It is not something earned—just as Luther learned and taught 500 years ago.

May the Lord your God put that Gospel Good News on your hearts today as you read this newsletter article, and indeed the entire year, as we celebrate the Reformation, but especially as we celebrate another year of life in our Lord Jesus Christ as the gift of our giving God. Happy New Year! In Jesus' Name. Amen!

Your brother and under-Shepherd in Christ,

Pastor Josh