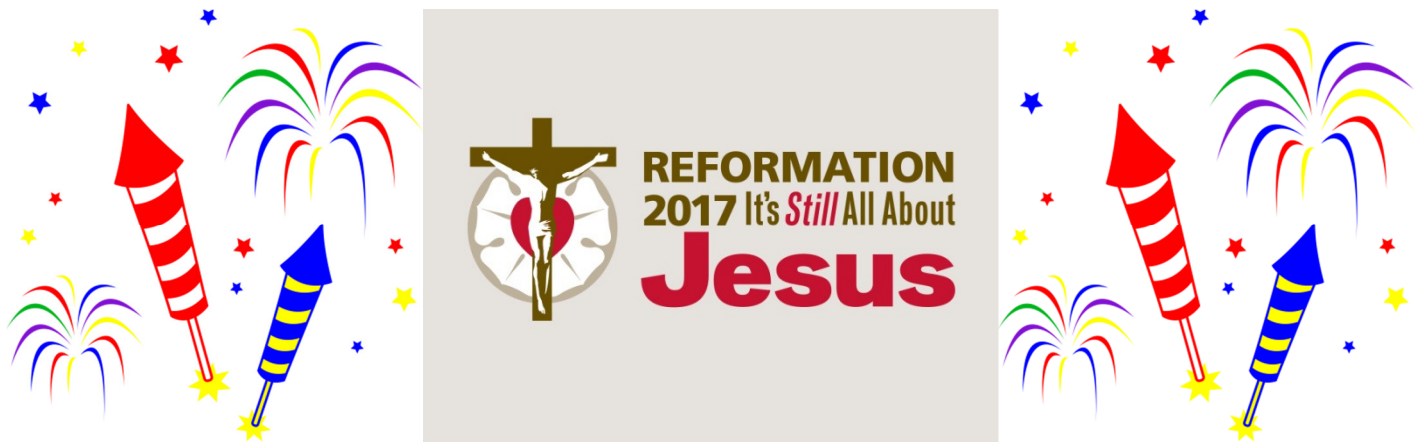


Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Greetings from the parsonage! The month for the Fourth of July is here. Just a few days ago, I was remembering the times I would play in a Community Band at Beardstown during the summer. We would play songs dedicated to each branch of the Armed Forces in July. This month is most certainly a time to enjoy and celebrate the freedoms we have as United States citizens; but also, and even more so, to give thanks to God for those freedoms. Yet our greatest freedom is the freedom from paying the price for our sins, thanks to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. So we continue to hear from His Word, even as we take vacations or simply enjoy summer vacation here.



Last time, we read about why the Holy Spirit is called the Holy Spirit—both because He is the Spirit of God and not the human spirit or any other spirit, and also because He sanctifies us—makes us holy—by revealing to us what God has done for us in His Son’s death and resurrection. Luther encourages us: “Learn this article, then, as clearly as possible. (That way, i)f someone asks, What do you mean by the words ‘I believe in the Holy Spirit’? You can answer, ‘I believe that the Holy Spirit makes me holy, as his name states.’ (Yet, the one who is asking may dig deeper, asking,) How does he do this, or what are his ways and means? Answer: ‘Through the Christian church, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting (BoC, p.436).”

In good Lutheran fashion, we might be asked, or we ourselves might ask to remind ourselves, what does this mean? Over the next few newsletters, we will explore the answer. We’ll begin with the term “Christian church.” Here is how Luther describes the Christian church. It is a “unique community in the world,” which

belongs to the Holy Spirit. She (the Church) “is the mother that begets and bears every Christian through the Word of God, which the Holy Spirit reveals and proclaims, through which he illuminates and inflames hearts so that they grasp and accept it, cling to it, and persevere in it (BoC, p.436).”

This holy Christian church is invisible; it is found only in the hearts of those who truly believe. It is created where the Word of God is spoken, but is maintained best where the Word is correctly proclaimed and taught and the Sacraments properly administered. Thus it may be found in all denominations using the Scriptures, yet, again, it is *best* continued where the Word may be spoken and proclaimed in its full truth and purity. And I am not the only one to say that problems occur in other denominations which do not use the Word to its fullest extent.

Luther wrote “Where (the Holy Spirit) does not cause (the Word) to be preached and does not awaken the understanding of the heart, all is lost, as happened under the papacy (that is, the Roman Catholic Church), where faith was swept completely under the rug and no one recognized Christ as the Lord or the Holy Spirit as the one who makes us holy. That is, no one believed that Christ is our Lord in the sense that he won such a treasure for us without our works and merits and made us acceptable to the Father. What was lacking there? There was no Holy Spirit present to reveal this truth and have it preached. Rather, it was human beings and evil spirits who were there, who taught us to obtain grace and be saved by our works. Therefore there was no Christian church. For where Christ is not preached, there is no Holy Spirit to create, call, and gather the Christian church, apart from which no one can come to the Lord Christ (BoC, p.436).”

By the mercies of God found in our Lord Jesus’ work of salvation for the forgiveness of our sins, then, we pray that God would preserve us from pastors who only preach as human beings—giving us false doctrine. Instead, we pray that He would send out laborers into His harvest who will preach and teach and administer the Sacraments rightly, so that faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior from sin might be taught to as many as will hear and believe it. In Jesus’ Name. Amen.

Your brother and under-Shepherd in Christ,

Pastor Josh