**“We Hold”**

Psalm 46

Revelation 14:6-7

Romans 3:19-28

John 8:31-36

 Reformation, Oct. 29/30, 2022

“We hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.”

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

**Bridge**

**We hold** that (as Scripture says) “as we confess **Christ** before men, He will also confess us before the Father who is in heaven.” “All are welcome here, but **Christ is honored**”, so it is not us we try to please here, but **Christ**, **Him** worshiped and listened to and focused upon, known as **Savior and Lord**, **God and the Gospel** **revealed to us in His incarnation, life, Words, suffering, death, then resurrection and ascension**.

**We hold** that, here, we “acknowledge the gifts that God has, personally, given us in His baptizing of us”, linking us with Jesus and His work and Words (so promises). We, here openly (and by profession) “renounce Satan and all his works and ways”, we profess that we “believe in God, the Father Almighty, in Jesus Christ, His only Son our Lord, and in the Holy Spirit”, **we hold** all of Scripture as Holy, the “inspired Word of God”, then (after that) the documented doctrines confessed by this church body and summarized in Luther’s Small Catechism “to be **faithful and true**”. **We hold** (so **it is our intention**) “to continue steadfast in our joint confession, and suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it” because Jesus requires us, again, to “**confess Him before men**”, so not stop and not waver …

… and we are Lutheran Christians not seeing it as “a new faith, but a continuation of the historic doctrines **held** **cooperatively for all times and places** as **universal** (or **catholic with a small “c” or “according to the whole” as is the definition of that word**) and **orthodox** (or **correct in a doctrinal stance that’s unapologetically upheld by us and defensible because it is of only Scripture**).

**Text**

**We hold** “that” (as Romans 3 tells us concisely) “whatever God’s Scripture (His Law) says **it holds** the whole world accountable to God, and that Word brings knowledge of sin”. What we did not read (but summarized in the first of 3 paragraphs in our Epistle text) is what came before our text: “**None** is righteous, no, **not one**; **no one** understands; **no one** seeks for God. **All** have turned aside; **together they have** become worthless; **no one** does good, **not even one**. **Their** throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive. The venom of asps is under **their lips**. **Their mouth** is full of curses and bitterness**. Their feet** are swift to shed blood; in **their paths** are ruin and misery; and the way of peace **they have not known**. **There is no fear of God before their eyes**”. “**None is righteous, no, not one**.” For anyone believing in the capacity of humanity, understand the reality of what Romans 3 clearly states: everyone **needs “saved”** and (as our Epistle’s first paragraph says clearly) “by works of attempting to do righteousness **no human being** will be justified in God’s sight” because we can’t … hence the need, then, for an **only divine salvation**.

There is no room in the **confession we hold** for “boasting” of ourselves, for thinking more of our capacity than this empty capacity toward salvation that Scripture reveals (but we know even in our deepest soul), there is no room in the **confession we hold** for self-righteousness and human potential apart from God’s salvation, **He alone justifies if He chooses to** …

… and He **did**. Before any movement to the Great News of Scripture’s Gospel, there is this realization that **we can’t save ourselves**. I’m still betting that most of the world / most of Christendom even, believes that we **can** to some degree or another. I’m betting most, in a poll, say the expectation for heaven’s gift is for decency, morality, trying hard to do our best and being on the, maybe, better side of a grading curve that **doesn’t exist as a curve**. “Be **perfect** as I the Lord your God am perfect” offers no curves that God grades on, salvation of “we poor sinners” is the only Good option (Scripture is clear about), and He (God) **provided that salvation** (but only through the **one way** that is given as Gospel professed that way) / **Christ, and Him crucified and resurrected for sinners** **/ Christ alone**.

That “righteousness” expected by God could never be **ours**, but He showed it **His … gifted**. “The **RIGHEOUSNESS OF GOD** has been manifested (or shown / demonstrated / incarnate) apart from the expectation”, Him “witnessed to” by Scripture, the “**righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe**”. Again, there is “no distinction: all humanity has sinned and do fall short of the glory of God, but justified (to **be** justified) by God’s grace **gifted** and **because of** the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, who God the Father put forward as a **propitiation**” (or **substitute so that mercy and grace could be offered rather than judgment upon failure**) “by His blood, to be received by faith. This showed God’s righteousness, demonstrating Him to be both **Just (or divinely fair)** and the **JUSTIFIER** of the one who has faith in Jesus”.

**Forgotten was this eternal truth and Gospel, freeing in the hearing of it**. The “righteousness” demanded by the Roman Catholicism was man’s, never to be accomplished in this life, of course, but offered a secondary location (upon death) in “purgatory”, salvation earned not granted by gift, “Paradise” a today destination upon earthly death, not a later possibility.

**This** was the **Reformation’s reminder**. **Radicals** tried to return to sin’s slavery of an impossible personal righteousness, but the **Reformation** continues to be fought for by a confession of salvation by grace alone that **binds Lutheran Christians together into a mission**. Not that we are the only ones professing it, but we are professing it without apology, our **“holding” to this** together as confessing Christians is why we are (what’s called) “synod” or those “walking together by this profession of the content of the Gospel”.

**Application**

**So what**, one might ask**?** **So that we humans “do not boast of ourselves” but do, indeed (and at all times), boast (or confess) Christ “before men”**. One thing Lutheran Christians are more than anything else is honest and appropriately humble … at least in confession. **We hold ourselves** to **no claim of righteousness before God on our own**, so **cling to the Gospel of God’s righteousness gifted in ways He, then, promises that gift can be gained**. **Baptism** is not the work of people, but of God to grant us not “**a**” name, but His name, “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit”. And, then, with Scripture alone as our rule and norm, we take it at it’s Word that “baptism **saves**” by God’s **connecting of us that way to Jesus that way** **(which Romans 6 reminds us of with clarity)**. **We hold** that salvation is “**by grace through faith**”, **not by works**, and the only work done upon a, for instance, child born to Godly parents in a Godly church is **by those charged with that child’s eternal care doing what the Great Commission commands done upon “all nations”: baptize and teach** **the, simply, gift receiver in the child**.

Besides that, God’s **Word** (Holy Scripture) is where **faith comes from**. It “comes from **hearing**, and **hearing by that Word of God**” (that’s Romans 10). Salvation by grace starts, often, in the waters of baptism, but **involvement in God’s Word is audibly available often even before the formal water is … in the wombs of the faithful even**. There are no special stores or store aisles for faith’s acquisition. So, gain it (and keep gaining it) as it is gifted by the means of the **hearing of God’s Words**.

May God **keep** you in His Son and build faith by **your involvement in God’s Word (His Law of honesty and Gospel of grace)**. A blessed Reformation remembrance to you in the **freedom of that truth**. In Jesus’ name. Amen.