



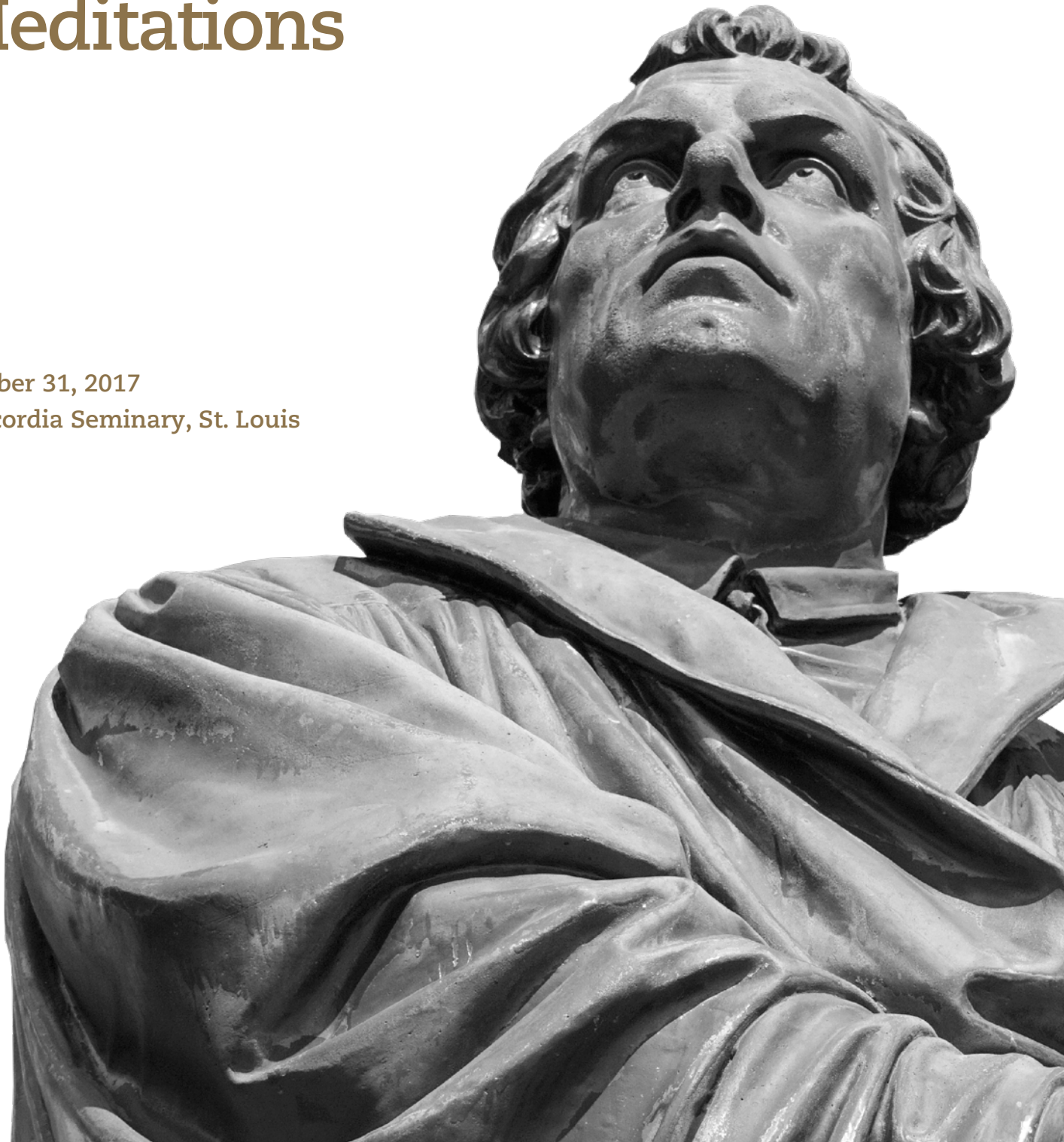
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# Anniversary Service Meditations

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Concordia Seminary, St. Louis





# Sola Scriptura

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“Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples which are not written in this book, but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, and that by believing, you may have life in his name” (John 20:31 RSV).

“I am content with this gift which I have, Holy Scripture, which abundantly teaches and supplies all things necessary both for this life and also for the life to come” (LW 6, 329). Those are Luther’s words, written just a few years before he died. He was commenting on Genesis chapter 37, which records Joseph’s dreams. In his comments Luther pointed out that many people seek God by looking for him in visions, dreams, and revelations. But not the old reformer. When he wanted to find God, he looked to the Scriptures.

In them, he saw a gift. With them, he was content.

It’s what the Scriptures do that makes them a gift. Or better, it’s what God does through them that makes them so significant. In these writings God teaches us everything we need to know. Everything! For this life and for the life to come. If we need to know it, God teaches it in the Scriptures. And if it’s not there? We don’t need to know it. This is *Sola Scriptura*. Everything we need, we find in Scripture alone. Everything we think we know is judged by Scripture alone.

But there’s a problem. *Sola Scriptura* has been mishandled. In many and various ways. The fact is that the Scriptures were never meant to remain alone. The Scriptures were not written to stand alone on the bookshelf in the living room collecting dust until the next baptism or wedding or funeral so that you could inscribe the name and the date, and then pass it on to your grandchildren. That’s not why these things were written! The Scriptures weren’t written to be a substitute for the church so that people would stay home and read the Bible by themselves, distilling the Christian life into “Jesus, my Bible,

and me.” That’s not why these things were written! The Scriptures weren’t written so we could take a word or a phrase or a verse away from the rest, as if God had given us a collection of timeless clichés that we could use, quite honestly, to justify just about anything. That’s not why these things were written! The misuses of *Sola Scriptura* are, indeed, many.

And yet, the slogan still stands. It still has something crucial to say. *Sola Scriptura* is the confession that the only Jesus we know, the only true Jesus, is the Jesus we find in these specific writings. The prophets testified to this Jesus (John 5:39). The fullness of God—the revelation of God—dwelt in this Jesus (Colossians 1:19). From the mouth of this Jesus came words that gave life. “Lord to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life” (John 6:68). To say *Sola Scriptura* is to say this Jesus alone. That is what these writings give us. Purely, truly, fully, without deception. That is why these things were written. So that we might believe in Jesus alone. So that we might have life in Jesus alone (John 20:31).

Ignatius of Antioch, around 110 AD, wrote a letter to the Christians in the ancient town of Philadelphia. Apparently, there were some people in Philadelphia who didn’t think you could find Jesus in the writings we now know as the Old Testament. So Ignatius wrote this in a letter to them: “To my mind it is Jesus Christ who is the original documents. The inviolable archives are his cross and death and his resurrection and the faith that came by him” (To the Philadelphians 8.2).

That, sisters and brothers, is *Sola Scriptura*! Jesus alone. Jesus’s death and resurrection alone. The faith that came by Jesus alone. Everything we need to know—which is another way of simply saying Jesus and all he is and does and says—we find in these Scriptures. In these Scriptures alone.

In them, we see a gift. With them, we are content.

In Jesus’s name, Amen.



# Sola Gratia

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*En el nombre del Padre y del Hijo y del Espíritu Santo.  
Amén.*

Do you believe in God, the Father? Good. In his explanation to the creed in his Small Catechism, Luther invites us to confess, “I believe in God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth.” Here Luther explains what it means to have God as our Father. I believe that God has created me, that he has given me and still preserves my body and soul. God daily and abundantly provides all the necessities and nourishment for this body and life. God protects me against all danger and shields and preserves me from all evil. And then Luther tells us why God has created, preserved us, provided for us, and protected us. He writes, “all this is done out of pure, fatherly, and divine goodness and mercy. Without any merit or worthiness of mine at all, for all of this, I owe it to God to thank and praise, serve and obey him.”

Now, do we thank and praise, serve and obey God so that he might be moved to give us his gifts? So that he might be a good, merciful Father to us? Or do we thank and praise and serve God because he has always been our good and gracious Father, because as a loving Father, he has always showered us with his gifts. In the world, people have what I tell my students is the Santa Claus view of God. Have you been a good boy or girl? If so, God will be good to you and give you lots of gifts. But if you have been a bad boy or girl, well then you're not worthy of receiving the goodies. While this way of thinking might make sense for many in the world, it can never describe our relationship with God the Father, who not only creates and preserves us but also saves us from sin, death, and the power of the devil through his Son Jesus Christ purely out of divine goodness and mercy without any merit or worthiness in me. Do you believe in this God, your gracious Father?

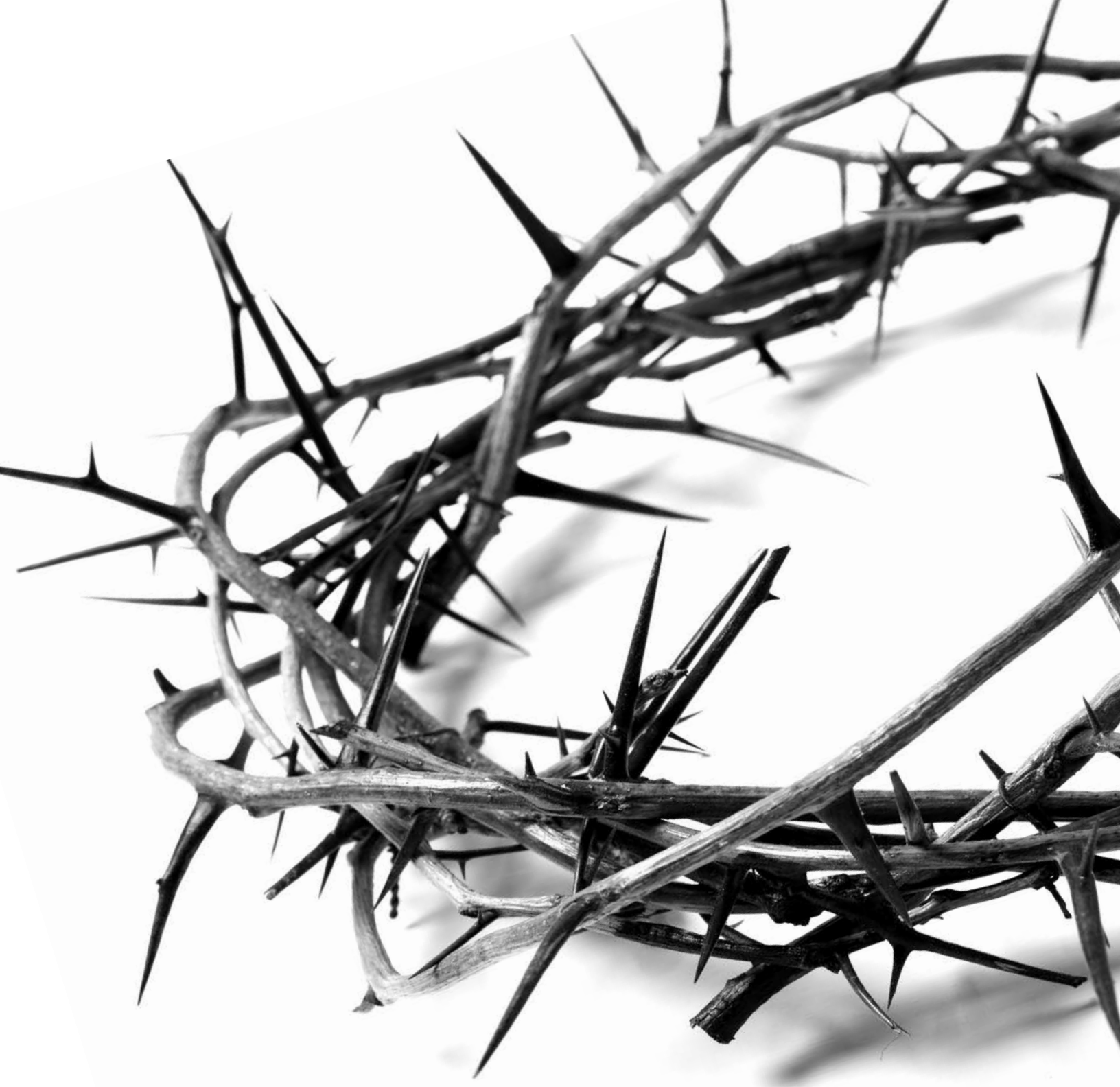
One of my favorite short animated films is “Red Boots

for Christmas.” It tells the story of Hans, a town's shoemaker who does not like Christmas. One night an angel appears to Hans and tells him that God will visit him on Christmas. In preparation for God's visit, Hans (also known as Juan!) decides that he will give God the best gift money can buy. After looking for the right gift around town with little success, Hans finally decides to make for God the most beautiful red boots the world has seen. Hans doesn't really get it. He thinks he needs to give God something so that God is on his good side, to receive his favor, his visitation, some expensive or beautiful gift. The best work of his hands. That will do.

Well, about halfway through the story, Hans seeks the advice of Gretchen, a humble, wise, trustworthy elderly woman in town. He asks her, “Gretchen, what would you give God for Christmas?” And Gretchen says to him the most beautiful words I have ever heard in an animated cartoon: “I would give him what I give him every day. My sin for his pardon, my weakness for his strength, my sorrow for his joy.” Gretchen gets it. (There's no good translation for Gretchen in Spanish.)

Hans wants to give God the very best he can offer him. But Gretchen knows she has nothing to give God but her sin, weakness, and sorrow. Even more important, she knows what her Heavenly Father gives to her: his pardon, his strength, his joy. Luther calls this giving and receiving a happy exchange. I give God my unrighteousness, my sin, and he gives me his righteousness, his forgiveness. Such a blessed exchange describes in practical terms what it means to have a gracious God and Father. You see, grace is God's disposition and choice to shower us with his gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation. A choice our loving Father makes, to use Luther's language, purely out of divine goodness and mercy without any merit and worthiness in us.

At the end of the story, when Christmas arrives, the angel shows up again and frustrated Hans complains that God never visited him. The angel takes Hans by the hand and shows him the image of baby Jesus on the manger in the church's nativity. Hans finally



gets it. God has graciously visited him in Christ. God has chosen to give Hans the greatest gift, the gift of his Son. Grace is not a matter of the human heart, something inside of us that moves us to give God our best so that we can receive the gift of his Son. No, grace is a matter of the heart of God, it is his kind move, his loving disposition to give us his very best indeed, his own Son for our very worst. His mercy and love in Christ for our trespasses. And it is by this

divine grace alone that we are saved and because the Father has been gracious to us through Christ, we his children with joy in the Holy Spirit thank and praise and serve and obey him.

Do you believe in God, the Father?

*En el nombre del Padre y del Hijo y del Espíritu Santo.  
Amén.*



Schreider.



# Sola Fide

**Dr. Erik Herrmann**

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In October 1518, in the city of Augsburg—almost exactly one year after Martin Luther posted his famous Ninety-five Theses—Luther stood before the pope’s official representative, Cardinal Cajetan, and defended the following assertion: “it is not the sacrament, but faith in the sacrament, that justifies.” When pushed on this point, Luther refused to budge, for in this, he said, “lies the whole summary of salvation.” And the Cardinal, with keen observation, replied: “but this is to build a new church!” The Cardinal was right, but not in the way we might think. Not the creation of a new denomination like Lutheranism or Presbyterianism or Methodism. What’s new is faith itself, and the great mystery that this faith makes all things new.

Why did Luther make such a fuss about faith ... indeed about faith alone? Couldn’t he just be satisfied with Scripture alone, or grace alone? Why faith? It’s a good question. It would certainly have softened the debates in sixteenth century if faith and faith alone was less of a prominent theme. Isn’t faith too weak, too facile, too subjective to lay such stress and weight upon it? If it’s just our faith, if its faith alone that justifies and saves us then what’s the point of church, what’s the point of the sacraments, what’s the point of trying to do good, what’s the point of popes, and bishops and funny hats, and altars and organs and fancy vestments and little envelopes with our name on them? This was the fear back then. This was the great scandal of what Luther seemed to be suggesting with faith alone. And frankly it’s still a scandal.

In every philosophy of life and every world-religion that has not been influenced or shaped by the Bible, “faith” is simply not a very central concept. Other religions have scriptures, holy writings and traditions. Other religions have special sacramental rites and practices. Other religions can even have a notion of grace. But faith ... faith finds a place of preeminence only in the Bible.

In the Old Testament, the root word for “faith” is one that we are all very familiar with: “Amen.” In the Old

Testament, when we come across this word it has to do with faithfulness—that what someone says will actually happen, will actually come about. When you come across faith (Amen) in the Old Testament it is not believing some general statement. It’s not about “truth” or “belief” in an abstract sense. It is not a cognitive concept detached from a relationship. Rather faith is rooted in a personal encounter—a person speaks to another person and his words are held to be true, because he faithfully carries it out, he does what he says he will do. Faith is something that a person awakes in another by being faithful to his word. When his words do not disappoint, when they are dependable, then and only then does one “believe” him. Only then does the believer say “Amen.”

Of course, we know that no single person is entirely dependable. Only God can perfectly carry out what he has promised. And so more often than not, the concept of “faith” in the Old Testament has to do with God being faithful, and people believing that what he says will come to pass, no matter how strange or how unlikely. Thus when God told Abraham that he would be the father of many nations even though he and Sarah were old and childless, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.” Throughout the many stories that we read in the Scriptures, again and again, it becomes quite clear that only God can claim faith in such an absolute and unconditional sense. Only God can elicit a perpetual “Amen.”

But then we come to the New Testament ... and “faith” is all over the place! There’s “you of little faith” and “I have not seen such faith” and “will the Son of man find faith” and “your faith has made you well” ... “go in peace, your faith has saved you” ... “according to your faith, be it done unto you” ... and “O woman, how great is your faith!” ... and “where is your faith?” and “increase our faith!” ... and “if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, even if you say to this mountain, ‘move from here to there’ ... ‘Be taken up and thrown into the sea,’ it will happen.” Faith is everywhere—it appears with such intensity in the words of Jesus and he ascribes such power to faith that it becomes the central religious concept of the New Testament.

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But Jesus also says something else. He has this really strange phrase that he says over and over again, “truly, truly, I say to you.” Well that’s how we usually see it translated. But if we left it in the original, it would sound even stranger and more remarkable to our ears. Because the phrase is really “Amen, Amen I say to you.” All the Gospels record him saying it over and over again, “Amen, I say to you...” This way of talking was not normal. It is utterly and completely unique. No one uses “Amen” in this way. Even in ordinary Christian usage, “Amen” comes at the end, as a response. Only Jesus begins his words with “Amen.” His words flow from the “Amen”—like a river that makes glad the city of God. Well, as a Lutheran might ask, “What does this mean?”

It seems to mean that faith and Jesus belong together. It means the simple fact that the prominence of faith in the Scriptures, the power, centrality and importance that is ascribed to faith is ultimately and only in its conjunction with the person of Jesus Christ. “Jesus is the essence of faith and faith is the essence of the work of Jesus.” It means that Jesus isn’t just the object of our faith, he is the very ground of faith, its beginning and end. It is as St. Paul notes in Galatians 3 that the coming of Christ is the coming of faith, or as the epistle to the Hebrews puts it, “[Jesus:] the author and perfecter of our faith” (Heb. 12:2).

When Jesus speaks his words he asserts a kind of conviction, a trustworthiness and authority that

strikes those who hear him as astounding, indeed almost blasphemous. When Jesus sees the faith of the paralyzed man’s friends and says, “take heart, my son, your sins are forgiven,” those present wondered, “what does he mean?” How can this person make such a lavish promise that only God can make and fulfill? What is he playing at? If one could do this then what would be the point of the temple and the sacrifices, the priesthood, the careful avoidance of all that would make one ritually unclean, and the special attention given to the holy rites and statutes of the law of Moses? What would be the point of it all, if this man could just look at faith and say ‘you’re forgiven’? “But which is easier,” responded Jesus, which is more likely to be true, to be a faithful saying, to be words that don’t disappoint but yield to an Amen—“your sins are forgiven” or “get up and walk”? And of course we know exactly how dependable Jesus’s words were. And as the paralyzed man ran home praising God, the people were astonished at this Jesus who spoke with such authority.

It has been said that in many ways the Reformation was a dispute about authority. Who has the authority to determine the truth about God and ourselves? Who has the authority to interpret the Scriptures? Who has the authority to mete out grace? Who has the authority to take away sins? Was it the pope? Was it a church council? Was it the emperor? Was it Luther? Who can really come through for us on these questions each and every time? And so when Luther





said *sola fide*, by faith alone, what he was really saying was that Jesus is the trustworthy one. He is the one who can carry out fully what he promises. Jesus and Jesus alone is the one who will come through for us.

Jesus is the one who says, “I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again.” What have we to add to this, but to believe he who has died for me and risen again just as he said? How can I doubt him who says “Amen, Amen, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life”?

A couple of years ago, a young lady, a professor of philosophy actually, came to the seminary to share with a few of us her story of how she became a Christian. She grew up in a loving family and environment that was nevertheless entirely secular. In high school, she tried reading the Bible once—at the very least it was important literature for Western history and she thought she should probably read it at least once. And she started in Genesis but by the time she got to the “begats,” (so-and-so begat so-and-so) she got lost and disinterested pretty quickly. And since she didn’t know you could actually skip over that for the time being, she left the Bible to itself. But as she got older a few events and relationships brought her to asking questions again about Christianity. And then one day a friend, a Christian colleague, let her

borrow his New Testament. So here she was, an adult professor of philosophy, a teacher of all of the great ideas of Western civilization, and yet for the first time she read the Gospels and met Jesus. And he was unlike anything or anyone she had ever met. She was immediately overwhelmed by this person who on the one hand was clearly a person from the first century in Roman-occupied Palestine. Yet he was also beyond all that somehow. She was struck how he could speak with such confidence and authority and exhibit such patience and compassion for the outcast, for women, for the poor. She knew that he had to be something more. And at first she didn’t believe all of the stories, the miracles, etc., but she couldn’t escape how Jesus talked. And finally she realized that this person was so worthy of being trusted, that she had to believe that he had risen from the dead. Because Jesus said he would, was confident that he would, believed that he would—she had to believe it too. On the strength of Jesus’s faith and Amen, she found her own faith to believe in him who died and rose again.

And so here we are—not 500 years later, but over 2000 years later—laying hold of this Jesus. Faith alone because faith is the gift of Jesus himself. And Jesus is the summation and culmination of all God’s word and work—Jesus and Jesus alone. As saint Paul said in 2 Corinthians 1: “For all the promises of God find their “Yes” in [Christ Jesus]. That is why it is through him that we utter our ‘Amen’ to God for his glory.” Amen.





# Soli Deo Gloria

**Dr. Dale A. Meyer**  
**President**  
**Professor of Practical Theology**

It is well, with my soul. It is well. On behalf of Concordia Seminary, I thank you for coming this evening. We are a little short on seats, we are a little short on programs, and in this day in age, changed American culture, sometimes our church is a little short on confidence in the gospel.

The Lord told Elijah: “there are still 7000 in Israel,” and Elijah knew the truth that those who are with us are more than those who are with them. And it is our prayer this evening that this anniversary of the reformation comes at the time when we as a church need it to be inspired again. With confidence and good courage that comes in the gospel, Lord Jesus Christ.

I want to thank the young people for your significant participation in the service this evening. You may not have thought about it this way, but I certainly have. The Lord is raising you up to be the earthly leaders of this church in the years that are ahead. Older people will go to heaven to be with Jesus and when we do, we will have the greatest confidence that this wonderful story of Jesus and his love for us is being

shared by you in your generation. Scripture alone, grace alone, faith alone.

The takeaway this evening is to God alone be the glory. But what does that look like? It starts with the recognition that you and I, all of us must give account to God. Christians are not exempt to the day of judgment. We will all appear before our Creator. Dr. Luther said, “we must let the foundation stand firm and sure that nobody will be saved by the faith or righteousness of another, but only by his own. And on the other hand, nobody will be condemned for unbelieving sins of another but for his own unbelief. Everyone must believe for himself. Everyone must believe for himself. The takeaway this evening is most personal. Jesus was asked by a professor, or at least a theologian, by someone who wanted to get him in trouble: “What is the greatest commandment”? and he replied, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment.” But then Jesus changed the assignment, and he added something else: “and you shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

What does it look like for you and me to give God the glory when we leave here and go back to our lives tomorrow? First, it is to love our Lord with all



our heart, mind, and soul. St. Paul put it this way: “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me. The life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself up for me.” That is the first great commandment that Christ gives us. In us. It is no longer you and I who are directing our lives. The part of the genius of blessed Martin Luther was that he took faith into the world, into the activities where you will be tomorrow and throughout the days of all your weeks. Luther described what giving God the glory looks like in his writing, *On the Freedom of a Christian*. He said, “Christians live not in themselves, but in Christ and their neighbor.” It is not just Sunday worship. We live in Christ and our neighbor. And then he adds: “Otherwise they are not Christian. They live in Christ through faith and in their neighbor through love. By faith they are caught up beyond themselves into God. By love they descend beneath themselves into their neighbor.” It is simply the Ten Commandments.

The first table which is about God, the second table which we sometimes dismiss because we think we have to discharge our duties by going to church on Sunday. The second table which Melancthon and Chemnitz called the true worship is love to the neighbor during the work-a-day week. May this

500-year anniversary of the Reformation lead you and me to the desperation—and I pick that word intentionally—may this anniversary lead you and me to the desperation that looks only to God for the grace that he gives and we receive through faith, through trusting in his mercy alone. So, what does it look like to give God the glory as we go into the rest of our lives? We have no spiritual life and then a weekday life. We cannot compartmentalize the claim which a great God and Jesus has made upon you and me.

We have only one life, a Christ-centered life in which we love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul and with all our mind. Equally we love our neighbor day in and day out as ourselves. The psalmist put it so well, and I pray that this will be also your intent. “Whom have I in heaven but thee and there is no one upon Earth that I desire beside thee. My heart and my flesh may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.” What Luther said at the end of his life that applies to each one of us every moment of our life—we are beggars that is true.

To God alone be all the glory.  
Amen.





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