

²¹ But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ²² This righteousness is given through faith in^[h] Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. ²⁵ God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement,^[i] through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—²⁶ he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. Romans 3:21-26 NIV

That text above is the text that turned a young monk by the name of Martin Luther from being afraid of God's punishments to be comforted and assured of God's love and forgiveness. Perhaps it was that fundamental re-discovery from the scriptures, that Christ was for him rather than against him that fueled the tenacity of Martin Luther challenging the established church ushering in what we know as the Reformation.

This Sunday is "Reformation Sunday" and 31st (Monday) is the actual day Martin Luther started challenging the existing order of things with the 95 Theses posted on the door of the Wittenberg church. The rest as we say "is history"

This Sunday at St. James I will be calling attention to the 300th birthday of Henry Melchior Muhlenberg. Pastor Muhlenberg is considered the "father" of organized Lutheranism in this country. Why would I combine the reformation and Muhlenberg 300th birthday? Because they both shared the same passion that folk would know that they indeed have wonderful powerful savior and friend in Jesus.

Both servants of God accomplished tasks that many men put together could not achieve. Luther spawned a reform of the church, even translating the Bible into his native German, setting the stage for Bible translations in the "people's language" in many places.

Henry Melchior Muhlenberg helped establish, and give help to over 100 churches from Savannah Ga., to Lunenburg, Nova Scotia, Canada. He set up a standard "liturgy" for the churches, a hymnal, organized the clergy into a "ministerium", and helped set standards for the training and ordination of clergy. Considering the transportation and communication vehicles of that day and age it was an amazing feat!

But I suspect if you asked them why they did so much, they would probably both point to the intimate knowledge and assurance of a savior Jesus Christ who forgave their sins, continually upheld them by God's grace, and his love for them in the promised assurance of eternal life.

If we are to honor these two servants of God more than just through their "historical significance", let examine our own personal faith journey. Is our faith just a "label" to which we identify ourselves with, or is our faith a vital part of our lives giving us a "solid foundation" to live each day in confidence that God is for us leading us to accomplish great things for God and neighbor?

Pr. John Van Haneghan