

SAVOR THE SOLAS

Ephesians 2:8-9 | Reformation Sunday | October 31/November 3, 2019

It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.

Jesu Juva!

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

When we talk about savoring something we're usually talking about food and drink: To *savor* means to taste something and enjoy it completely. A medium rare filet mignon with a smoked bacon butter crust. A fine, full-bodied, oaky cabernet from the Napa Valley. A creamy bourbon vanilla crème brulee with a crunchy caramelized sugar crust. These are the kinds of foods one savors. Nobody savors a McDonald's McDouble. You eat it quickly in your car, hope that nobody saw you and spend the rest of the day dealing with indigestion and guilt.

Of course there are other things we can savor besides just edibles. A mom of three toddlers with an entire hour to herself goes to a coffee shop, orders a cappuccino, plops down in a deep leather chair with a good book, and just savors the peace and quiet. A hunter walks to his blind in the chill of an early autumn morning and savors the smell of the woods, the rustle of the leaves and the anticipation of the hunt. A grandma looks around at the kids and grandkids noisily tearing open their presents in the light of the Christmas tree and savors the rare joy of having everyone together under one roof.

Today is a big day for us Lutherans. Today we celebrate the Reformation. Today we give thanks for the rediscovery and return of the pure gospel to God's church. This is a time for rejoicing. This is a time for savoring. On the basis of God's Word before us today let's SAVOR THE SOLAS – three Latin phrases that summarize how God saves sinners. *Sola gratia* – by grace alone. *Sola fide* – by faith alone. *Sola Scriptura* – by Scripture alone.

Sola Gratia

Isn't it something how truly amazing things can become routine, mundane, even boring? For example, you got in your car this morning, turned the key, fired it up and drove here. The internal combustion engine is an old invention, but it still works really well. And the reliability, comfort and convenience of modern cars is pretty amazing, but we don't usually give it a second thought.

Has *grace* become boring? Are we at times less than wowed by the good news of God's underserved love for sinners? *What was the sermon about today, honey? Grace. Again.*

Perhaps it will help us to remember just how utterly lost and hopeless we would be without God's grace. God's Word

makes clear we are sinners, worthy of God's wrath and punishment. So what? Consider what God said through the prophet Ezekiel: **The one who sins is the one who will die** (18:20). If you've ever seen *Survivorman* on TV, then you know host Les Stroud's favorite survival tip: "You sweat, you die." If you let yourself perspire in a winter weather survival situation, you are likely to freeze to death. God's Word offers this survival tip: You sin, you die. It's that simple. **The wages of sin is death** (Romans 3:23). And we're not just talking here about the dirt nap that's in all our futures, we're talking about eternal death – the eternal shame and regret of hell.

But I'm not that bad of a sinner. *I haven't murdered anybody*. But you sometimes hate people in your heart. *I haven't cheated on my husband*. But you'd be mortified to reveal the lustful thoughts that sometimes march through your mind. *I don't beat my wife*. But sometimes your words cut like a razor.

We don't like to hear this, but the truth is that we are miserable, sinful wretches, damnable sinners every last one of us. And if we rely on "I'm not so bad" defense, we will be condemned to hell, where there isn't even hope of hope.

I don't want to bore you but, are you ready to hear about grace again? Of course, you are. Me too. I need it so desperately.

Grace is perhaps the Bible's most important word. Like a Swiss army knife, grace packs a lot in small package, a single

syllable filled with everything the sinner needs. This one little word tells us exactly what God thinks of us. He loves us.

Let's be clear. God doesn't love us because we are lovable. He doesn't love us because we have earned or deserved his love. He loves because, quite simply, he *is* love (1 John 4:8). There's nothing in us that invites his love, nothing that he finds attractive about us. It all comes from him. He loves us because he loves us. That's grace.

Grace is not just a beautiful idea. Grace is an action. In grace God acted to save us. God himself took on our flesh and made a humble feeding trough his first cradle. That's grace. God walked humbly under his own laws, obeyed them perfectly and gives us the credit for doing so. That's grace. God climbed onto a cross, stretched out his hands, received the nails, shed blood of infinite value and bowed his head in death to pay not only for our sins, but the sins of the whole world. That's grace. God himself lay cold and dead in a tomb but rose bodily from that tomb early on Sunday morning, filled with life and glowing with victory, both of which he shares with us so that we have forgiveness and life, now and forever. That's grace.

Revel in it. Rejoice in it. Savor it. **It is by grace you have been saved.**

Sola Fide

How does what God in grace did for us become our own? How do we get the forgiveness and life that Jesus won for us?

Paul answers: **It is by grace you have been saved, through faith.**

We better define faith, because we are surrounded by incorrect definitions. To the world faith is just positive vibes, good feelings. “You just gotta have faith.” Faith, as defined by the world, is a rather nebulous emotion.

When the Bible talks about faith it is talking about something very specific. Paul told the jailer in Philippi: **“Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved”** (Acts 16:31). Jesus said: **“Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved”** (Mark 16:16). A one-word definition for faith is *trust*. To believe is to trust God’s promises. To believe is to trust in Jesus Christ alone for forgiveness, life and salvation. That’s faith.

And it is a precious gift. **This is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.** In his explanation of the Apostles’ Creed, Luther wrote: “I believe that I cannot by my own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him.” Faith is not our choice or decision. It is a gift from God, prompted once again by his grace. Through this gift God channels to us every blessing that Jesus won for us.

Imagine a starving man. He’s so weak that he can’t put food in his mouth or even chew it. All he can do is lie there in a hospital bed. Without nutrition he will die. He needs nourishment. The best way to do this is with an IV solution. The bag of life-saving nourishment is connected to the man’s arm by means of a needle and a tube so that life-saving calories flow into

his body.

That’s a good description of our situation. Sin left us spiritually starving. Without proper nourishment we would have died eternally. Jesus is the nourishment we need. The Spirit connects us to him by the IV tube called faith. This faith is the pipeline by which God channels to us the nourishment of Jesus, every blessing that he won for us. Through faith we have the forgiveness of sins. Through faith we have a new life, a life of peace and power to live for God. Through faith we have the sure hope of eternal life.

Katie Luther, the great reformer’s wife, one gave a great description of faith. She said, “I will cling to Christ like a burr to a topcoat.” That’s what faith does. It clings to Christ alone.

My friends, savor the Spirit’s gift. You are a believer in Jesus. God has gifted you with faith. Be glad and rejoice!

Sola Scriptura

But how did God give you this precious gift? Does he just zap it into you from above? If we pray hard enough will faith suddenly fill our hearts? The Bible gives us a clear and simple answer: **Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ** (Romans 10:17). God uses the gospel, the good news of his love and forgiveness in Christ, to plant and grow faith in our hearts.

Have you ever seen an infomercial, and wondered if the product advertised actually works. A famous example is Ginsu

knives. Remember those? First, we see a Ginsu knife sawing through a nail or aluminum can. Next we see supposedly the same knife slicing effortlessly through a ripe tomato. Does it really work? I never owned a Ginsu knife, but I doubt it.

Does God's Word really work? I mean, come one. We're talking about words on a page. Does the message of the Bible really have the power to change hearts and lives? Millions of Christians all over the world are living, breathing proof of the power of God's Word. You are living, breathing proof of this power. And this should not surprise us. After all, Paul told the Romans that the gospel is **the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes** (1:16).

God's Word works. Through the gospel – whether we find it on the pages of God's Word or in the Sacraments – the Spirit is at work to change the hearts and lives of sinners.

Martin Luther once spoke of the power of God's Word this way: **"I simply taught, preached, and wrote God's Word: otherwise I did nothing. And then when I slept or drank Wittenberg beer with my friend Philip of Amsdorf, the Word so greatly weakened the papacy that never a prince or emperor did such damage to it. I did nothing: the Word of God did it all."**

Why did the Reformation happen? Why is there a Lutheran Church? Why do we believe in Jesus Christ as our Savior? The Word did it all.

Sola gratia. Sola fide. Sola Scriptura. We are saved by God's grace alone, through faith in Jesus Christ alone, which the Spirit works in our hearts through Scripture alone. These are the great truths of the Reformation. These are the truths that have been handed down to us. These truths are our great heritage. Revel in them. Rejoice in them. Give thanks for them. Savor the Solas! Amen.

S.D.G.