

Still! Providing Peace 500 years Later.

Oct 1, 2017.

Do you know the place in history of a Michael King? Does that name sound familiar to you?

He was named after his father actually. So at his birth in 1929, a Michael King Jr. was added to the family. When he grew up, he became a minister, like his father. I bet you've heard of him, even if his name doesn't sound familiar initially. You see... While he was still a child, his father took a trip to Germany. There Michael King Sr. became so moved by the history of the Reformation, evidently especially the way God used Martin Luther, that when he came home to America... he changed his name. He went from Michael King to *Martin Luther* King. He also changed his son's name from Michael King Jr to... *Martin Luther* King Jr.

It's a little connection between Germany from 500 years ago and more recent American history. What strikes me is...

We, as a group, have done a similar thing to what Michael King ended up doing for himself and for his son. We've also taken up the name "Luther." It is in our church name: "*Lutheran*." In comments about the people gathered here, you'll hear it in descriptions like, "Those *Lutherans* sure like to sing" or (if we're in luck today) "*Lutherans* sure know how to have a potluck."

But we want to be clear. We don't put our trust in Martin Luther. We are Christians. We trust in Jesus Christ. We don't idolize or worship Martin Luther. We have his name in our church name to express a connection with him and with what took place 500 years ago. Simply put, we follow the same pattern that he followed:

We go to the Word of God, the Bible, to find every truth in which to rest and find refuge. We find in the Bible the message that we are saved by God's grace alone – his undeserved love to us – and not by any merit or work on our part. We know from the Bible that it is through faith in Jesus that we are forgiven and gifted eternal life. Trust in Jesus alone, and nothing else and no one else, as your way to heaven.

Here I stand today. You are gathered here with me. How is it that we have come to know the truths of God, and have been able to hold on to them to this day? The Word. The Word of God. The Word of God endures. It has been preached, and God has brought it to our ears and planted it in our hearts and kept it alive here.

Still! It's still... by God's Word alone that we know His truth - saving truth.

Now set yourself down at Jesus' feet to hear him convey this truth by means of the parable we've got in front of us. Luke 16:19-31-

19 "There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. 20 At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores 21 and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. 22 "The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. 23 In Hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. 24 So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.' 25 "But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. 26 And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.' 27 "He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family, 28 for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' 29 "Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.' 30 " 'No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' 31 "He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.' "

In vs.29, understand: "Moses and the Prophets" is a phrase at that time, in Jesus' day, was used for "God's Word" or "the Scriptures." It would be equivalent to in our day saying "they have the Bible."

Note in vs.30: It is clear to everyone that the all-important issue in whether a soul ends up in heaven or hell is “repentance.” The rich man knows he lacked repentance. He knows the only way for his brothers to not end up in hell, where he was, would be for them to be brought to repentance.

A person who is repentant is: one who admits their sin and helplessness to be rid of its guilt, and who trusts in Jesus as the only rescue – the Rescuer/Savior promised.

So that truth stands uncontested in the parable.

The only thing to still settle is: And how are individuals brought to repentance, to faith in Jesus?

The rich man tries to object to God’s answer. “No,” he says in reply to hearing that Moses and the Prophets – the Word of God – is the answer. “No,” the rich man attempts to protest, “There must be some other way to get through to people, like my brothers.”

And God’s answer is again affirmed in vs.31. How are people brought to repentance? It is the Word of God bringing hearts to see sin, confess and also to trust the news that Jesus takes away our sin and gifts eternal life. Here is the answer to those who think some other way would work better, or some better way must be needed: “If they will not listen to God’s Word, they will not be convinced by other ways.”

The apostle Paul later in the Bible wrote to Timothy: “You have known the Holy Scriptures – the Word of God – which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.” Today we sit at Jesus feet and hear the same spoken to us: “the Holy Scriptures – the Word of God – this is what is able to bring you to repentance, to faith in Jesus, and ultimately to the joys of heaven.”

So what now? Have we got this? You agree on the importance Jesus attributes to the Word? You trust God’s message here, and trust in Jesus as your rescuer from sin and hell? If so, I say to you...

Stay humble. Stay alert and vigilant. Keep going back to God’s Word.

Remember how: so many who had God’s truth, lost God’s truth. That has happened so many times throughout history. We heard an example in our Bible lesson earlier in Jeremiah (ch.23:1-6): so many from among God’s Old Testament people who had God’s truth, lost God’s truth. They drifted and wandered from it. It was true in Jesus’ day also. Jesus’ words here in Luke 16 are in reply to a group who were rejecting his teaching and him. So many who had God’s truth, lost God’s truth.

So stay alert and vigilant.

And stay humble. Think of all the times where sinful desires and temptation have led you to look past a part of God’s Word: forgetting, ignoring, or missing what God’s Word clearly says. You wandered into a sin. What corrected you, and turned you from your sin and back to the Lord to confess your sin? What led you to treasure God’s forgiveness to you? The Word. The Word of God. Keep returning to the Word.

Still! It’s still by God’s Word alone¹ that we know His truth. And it’s by the Holy Spirit working through the Word that we’ll be able to hold on to His truth until the day we reach our home in heaven.

¹Note: We don’t forget here that God’s powerful Word also comes connected with water in baptism, as well as connected with bread and wine in the Lord’s Supper. These are means by which God also brings us His truth and strengthens our faith.