

I feel bad for Moses. All those years he struggled with the people after leaving Egypt. He kept the Israelites on the right track out there in the wilderness as they suffered hunger, thirst, other violent tribes of people, and finally, they reached to their destination, and Moses wasn't able to enter it with his people. God gave the people commandments to follow so that they would be a people who had faith in God and faith in each other. The commandments to love God and love your neighbor were found in Deuteronomy chapter 6:5 and in Leviticus 19:18.

Jesus said to the Samaritan woman whom he met at the well, <sup>37</sup> For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' (Joh 4:37 NRS)

It was true with Moses, it was true with Jesus who came to tell us that we have been brought from slavery into freedom, and out of death into life.

It was true for Paul who sure loved those Thessalonians. If he had a longer life and could live out the rest of his years in peace, and not been tried and put to death in Rome, I bet he would want to live his golden years in Thessalonica. He brought God's word in the person of Jesus Christ to so many, but didn't get to enjoy the fruits of his labor.

Last week I spoke about Martin Luther and the work he did to try to reform the Roman Church. His words started such a revolution in the church that the whole Protestant sect was formed with Calvin, Zwingli, Thomas Cranmer and many others. The flood gates were opened for many reforming minded people (OK, men) to come forward and state their own versions of what God really was saying in the Hebrew and Christian testaments. **Sola scriptura**, was a tenet of the day. The bible was translated into German, French, Spanish, English, and then hundreds of other languages.

In faith, we stand before God in the light of grace. All we have to present before the Holy One is our imperfect selves – all the good things we attempt to do, and all the bad things we have done. We can't make up a list to present to God and show the Lord that there were some not so great things we have done, but look at all the good deeds I have listed here on this side of the page!

All the reforming traditions; Presbyterians, Methodists, Anglicans, Puritans, Anabaptists, Quakers, and others agree on this one thing. We can't buy our way into heaven, and we can't earn our way into heaven. That may seem like bad news. So, how do we get to heaven? We just have to die. That's all. We just have to live our lives knowing that we are saved by grace through faith.

Luther, who narrowly escaped being put to death for all he said against the church, did live to a ripe old age. But in his old age he suffered many ailments which seemed to have made him an unhappy man. He began to criticize the Jews sharply and unfortunately, that legacy took a very tragic turn in modern history. He fully believed that it was the Jews who murdered Christ. Now, we understand

that it was not the whole Jewish nation that rejected Jesus, but a few men in power who were threatened by Jesus' truth-telling

.<sup>[203]</sup> <sup>[204]</sup> In 1523, Luther advised kindness toward the Jews in *That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew* and also aimed to convert them to Christianity.<sup>[205]</sup> When his efforts at conversion failed, he grew increasingly bitter toward them.<sup>[206]</sup>

Luther's major works on the Jews were his 60,000-word treatise *Von den Juden und Ihren Lügen* ([On the Jews and Their Lies](#)), and *Vom Schem Hamphoras und vom Geschlecht Christi* ([On the Holy Name and the Lineage of Christ](#)), both published in 1543, three years before his death.<sup>[207]</sup> Luther argued that the Jews were no longer the chosen people but "the devil's people", and referred to them with violent language.<sup>[208]</sup> Luther advocated setting [synagogues](#) on fire, destroying Jewish [prayerbooks](#), forbidding [rabbis](#) from preaching, seizing Jews' property and money, and smashing up their homes, so that these "envenomed worms" would be forced into labour or expelled "for all time".<sup>[211]</sup> In [Robert Michael](#)'s view, Luther's words "We are at fault in not slaying them" amounted to a sanction for murder.<sup>[212]</sup> "God's anger with them is so intense," Luther concluded, "that gentle mercy will only tend to make them worse, while sharp mercy will reform them but little. Therefore, in any case, away with them!"<sup>i</sup>

As you might imagine, it was just these words that the Nazis, four hundred years later, seized on to try to show that they were justified in putting Jews in concentration camps and killing millions of them.

Luther, then, did not live to see all the good that he had done in helping ordinary people have access to God's word through being able to read the Bible for themselves in their own language. But he also did not get to see the hundreds of years of fighting that has occurred between Catholics and Protestants who have felt that only their religion was the correct one, and have killed people in the name of God in heinous ways.

If people are now able to read the Bible for themselves, why haven't they taken to heart, Love God and Love your Neighbor?

We have reached an age, thank God, where we have more respect for other religions, and other ways of knowing our Higher Power. And it has only taken 500 years since the Reformation to come to this understanding. God's law given through Moses, all the Prophets, and what Jesus came to fulfill is the law of love; love which respects, which sacrifices, love which seeks to understand, to forgive, and to share another's burdens. This is the kind of love that we are asked to have for God and for our neighbor.

May God help us all to seek, to know, and to do the loving thing in all that we undertake.

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<sup>i</sup> Wikipedia, "Martin Luther."