

AN ORIENTATION TO DISCIPLESHIP

GRACE

Changes

EVERYTHING

Grace

GRACE CHANGES EVERYTHING.

That's quite a statement... but it's true! In the immortal words of Bono, the lead singer of the rock group U2 "Grace. It's a name for a girl. It's an idea that changed the world."

As God's people here at Immanuel, we are part of the Lutheran tradition of Christianity. It's something that we are very proud of because we stand firmly on the idea that God's grace in Jesus Christ is central to his message. Everything that we do, whether it is in our generosity, in our relationships with one another, or in what we talk about on Sunday morning is all about grace.

But grace is so much more than just an idea for Sunday morning. It truly is an idea that has changed the world... more than once! So what's so amazing about grace? How has this one little word changed the world that you live in today? And how does Immanuel Lutheran continue to stand on and live out this life changing, world altering idea? That's what we're going to find out!

Before we go any further, what does grace mean to you?

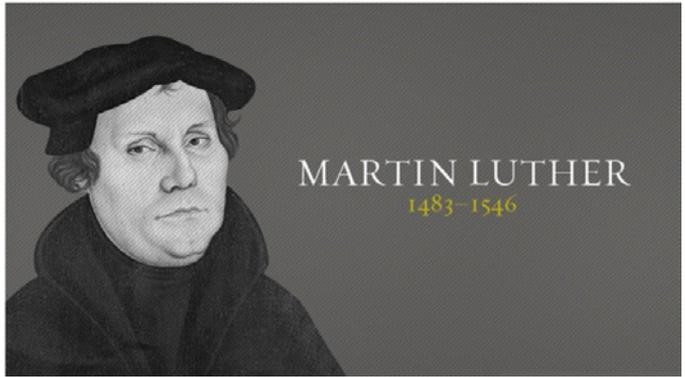


A MAN NAMED MARTIN

So where do Lutheran's get this love for grace? It all starts with a man named Martin.

Martin Luther was born in Eisleben, Germany in 1483. His parents, Hans and Margarete, wanted

Luther to be a lawyer. So as he grew up, they sent him to the best law schools that they could afford. He studied law at the University of Erfurt and was an above average student.



Everything was going according to his parents' plan until July 2, 1505. He was on his way back to the university when he was caught in a horrible thunderstorm. A devout Catholic, he believed that the storm was God's judgment on him becoming a lawyer. He was so terrified that he famously called out, "Help, St. Anna, I will become a monk." Since he was saved from the storm, he followed up on his promise, a choice that his parents weren't exactly wild about.

Luther threw himself into his studies as soon as he made the switch from law to the monastic life. He joined the Augustinian order as a monk. He chose the Augustinians for their tough spiritual practices such as long fasting, periods of silence, and pilgrimages that were meant to help the individual monks stay solely focused on their study.

As Luther continued his study, he became more and more concerned that God was angry with him. He read passage after passage in the Old Testament that drove Luther to see God as an angry God. He saw Jesus as angry as well because Luther's sins had caused Jesus to go to the cross. Luther was so concerned about making God happy that he would spend up to 4 hours in personal confession and was known to beat himself unconscious as way to appease God.

TIME FOR A CHANGE?

Seeing the anguish that Luther was in, his Father Confessor, Johann Von Staupitz, suggested that Luther start to study the New Testament, to learn more about Jesus. Oddly enough, Luther to this point had never studied the New Testament!

During this study, Luther came across these words from *Romans, Chapter 3*.

“But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it – the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,”

Luther would later say that when he read those words, it was as if he had been “born again.” God’s righteousness, his perfection, his forgiveness, his love... grace... is a gift. A free gift from God.

Grace as a gift. For his entire life, Luther had been taught that God’s grace was something that you had to earn. It was that idea that caused him to give up becoming a lawyer to go into the monastery! He thought it would make an angry God happy. But now Luther was reading something that changed all of that. God loves you simply because he loves you, not because of something you do!?

Has there been a time when grace, either God’s or someone else’s, has changed your life?

TAKING IT TO THE STREETS!

As you can imagine, this new discovery changed everything for Luther. He no longer saw God as angry but as a loving God. Jesus didn't go to the cross out of obligation, but out of love for him. All of God's message in the Bible changed. God wanted to forgive. He wanted to take the burden of our sin. He wanted to make our relationship right with him. And it was all out of Fatherly love and concern for us as his children.

This new way of thinking had Luther asking some questions to his superiors. Why did the church at the time not tell people that they were freely forgiven? Why did they keep making people earn their forgiveness when it was a free gift in Jesus Christ?

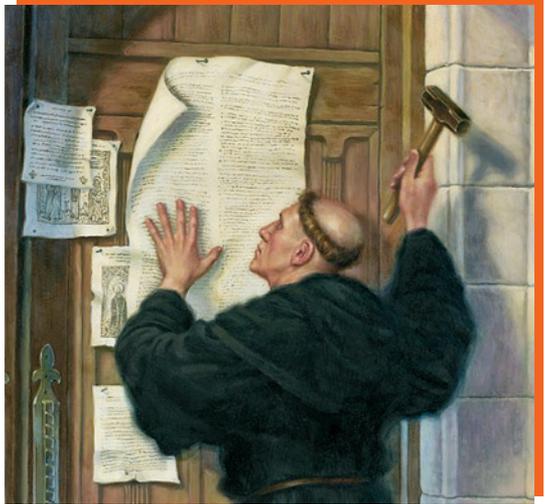
Luther kept asking questions. At first this wasn't a big deal. But in 1517, Luther asked one too many questions. Actually, it was more than one. It was 95.

At that time, the Catholic Church was working to build St. Peter's Basilica in Rome (Yes, that St. Peter's).

One of the ways that they were raising funds was by selling indulgences. An indulgence was a receipt, a piece of paper, that represented God's forgiveness for you or for a loved one. What was being taught was that when you paid for the indulgence, you purchased some of God's forgiveness from the church.

Martin Luther, after his discovery that God's grace was a free gift, wasn't too pleased about this. So he wrote 95 Theses, or questions, to the Catholic church. These were simply questions about the church practices. He nailed those questions to the church door at Wittenburg, where he now was a professor at the University.

Let's be clear about a few things. Luther didn't nail the Theses to the door at night. It wasn't some huge deal. Lots of people nailed things to the doors. It was like a community bulletin board. When you wanted people to see something, you put it on the church door. All Luther was doing, at first, was asking a few questions.



However, the church didn't take too kindly to his questions. From that day forward, the church tried to get Luther to fall in line. When he wouldn't back down, they called in the big guns. They called him to a meeting with the Holy Roman Emperor (*He was neither holy nor Roman. Discuss*). The idea was that if Luther wouldn't stop, they would silence him by... well, killing him.

It was at this meeting that Luther was asked to "recant" or reject his teaching as false. He famously said, "I cannot and will not recant. Here I stand. I can do no other." From that day forward, Luther was enemy number one for the Catholic church and the Reformation was born.

AN IDEA THAT CHANGED THE WORLD

So how did this idea of grace change the world? Well, as we said last time, Jesus is the one question that everyone has to answer. In other words, no one has done more to shape the world we live in than its own Creator and Savior, Jesus.

But when Luther discovered God's grace for himself, it was an idea that changed his entire life. Luther rose to prominence in Germany. He was consulted by political leaders. His writings were some of the first to be mass produced on this new fangled contraption called the Gutenberg Printing Press. So he wasn't just speaking to his own town. He was speaking to the world.

SO HERE ARE A FEW THINGS THAT LUTHER'S DISCOVERY OF GRACE LEAD TO.

- **Worship Services in The Local Language**

Prior to Luther, all services were conducted in Latin only.

- **The Bible In The Local Language**

Everyone needed to be able to read about God's goodness

- **Music**

Prior to Luther, only the choir sang in church and music could only be written for performance in the church. Without Luther... no concerts!

- **Public Education**

Because all people are equal in God's eyes, everyone should be educated.

- **Democracy**

Luther didn't start it... but the idea that all people are created equal started with his discovery that everyone is equally loved by God.

- **Separation of Church and State**

Luther saw that God gave his forgiveness through the church and kept order through the government. Mixing the two would create either a weak government or a tyrannical church.

- **Private Property**

Some economics scholars believe that Luther's understanding of the Gospel, again that everyone is equally loved by God, helped lay the foundation for the idea of private property.

In fact, when the History Channel made its list of most influential people of the Millenia in 2000, Luther was second to Gutenberg and his printing press. Not too bad."

Have you ever considered the different ways in which God's grace affects other parts of your life? The world?

SO WHAT'S A LUTHERAN?

It's a fair question. Here's what we don't believe. We don't believe that Martin Luther is the 4th person of the Trinity. We don't follow everything that Martin Luther said. We don't believe he's the only person that God speaks through. He's just another follower of Jesus. We simply see that God used this man at a specific time in history to make his love known to the world.

So why do we call ourselves Lutheran? (By the way, Luther didn't want the Reformation Church to be called Lutheran. He hated the idea.) We call ourselves Lutheran because we agree with what Martin Luther saw as the main points to being a Christian. He summed these up in three statements;

Grace Alone.

Faith Alone.

Scripture Alone.

We believe in God's grace alone. What we do doesn't save us. You can't save yourself. To drive this point home, Luther said that "Unless we despair of even our best works and see them as mortal sin, we do not rightly understand grace." In other words, it's all God. You are forgiven and loved because of Jesus.

Why do you think this idea of Grace alone is sometimes so hard to believe?



We believe that it is through faith in Jesus alone that people are saved. Again, not by our own works, but simply by believing that Jesus lived, died, and rose again and that he did that for you, to forgive you and restore the relationship with you. This is most clearly stated in *Ephesians 2:8-9*:

“For it is by grace that you have been saved, through faith, and this is not of yourself, it is a gift of God, so that no one can boast.”

Is it really that simple? We would say yes. No strings? Nothing more? Nope. This is one of the biggest differences between Christianity and other belief systems. Other religions, whether it's Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, any other belief system tells you what you have to do to be saved. God wants to tell you that it's done because of Jesus Christ. It's faith alone.



And that brings us to the last “alone,” Scripture alone. As Lutherans, we believe that the Bible is truly the word of God. That means that it's God's way of telling us everything we need to know when it comes to knowing him. We don't add to the Bible with new teachings. We don't take away from what the Bible already speaks about. Everything we teach comes from the Bible.

It's usually this last point that gets people talking a little bit. So lets do that...

What do you think about the Bible?

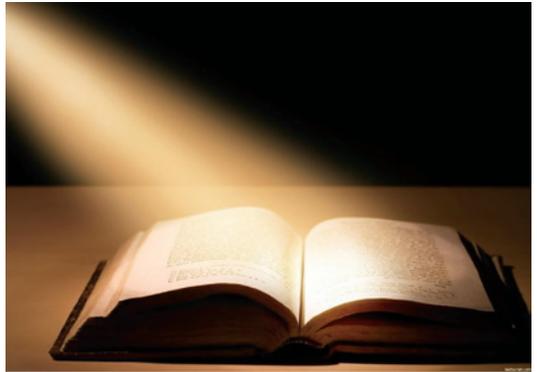
THE BIBLE DECODED!

The Bible is not just a single book. It is actually 66 books put together. These books were written by different authors over the course of 1500 years, starting with Moses and ending with John, one of Jesus' disciples. We do not believe that the Bible is history in that it doesn't tell us what happened to dinosaurs. It doesn't let us know about what's happening in China at the time of David. But it is a special history. It's God's history. It's his story of how he worked in the world he created to save it from the evil that we brought into the world. So it is history in that it happens in real time and in human history, but it is not history in that it doesn't have every detail of what happened during the year 1700 BC, only the details of how God was saving his people.

Sometimes people will question whether we can trust the Bible. They will say that it was written down over such a long period of time, there's no way that it doesn't have mistakes. In all honesty, the Bible does have mistakes. We know that. Now I don't want you to be alarmed. The Bible is the most studied and most scrutinized book in all of history. More people have set out to disprove the Bible than any other. So when I say that there are mistakes, here's what I mean.

We believe that God inspired human authors to write his words. That's why we call it God's word. It's his message, not ours. So the original copy would be perfect!

Unfortunately, we don't have any first editions. We have copies of copies of copies. It's in the copying that the mistakes occur. Mistakes like writing a word twice or skipping a line. That sounds really bad, but it's not as bad as it sounds. Luther was part of a movement in the church to really get back as close to the original as possible.



Scholars have been working tirelessly ever since to make sure that we point out every "mistake" and try and figure out what was written first. Again, the church isn't hiding the mistakes, we are working through them!

Another popular question about the Bible is "Aren't there books that were kept out of the Bible?" The answer is yes. If you ever watch a documentary on the History Channel or if you have read the Davinci Code by Dan Brown, you will hear about "other gospels". There is the Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of Mary the Mother of Jesus, the Gospel of Judas, and the Gospel of Peter just to name a few. So people will point to these and say that the church is trying to hide the "real Jesus," that there is some massive conspiracy at play.

The only problem is that these gospel accounts aren't written until much later. The Gospel of Matthew, the first Gospel, was written between 15 and 20 years after Jesus resurrection. The Gospel of John, the latest, was written between 30 and 40 years after Jesus. Compare that to the Gospel of Thomas that doesn't exist, there is no evidence for it, until after 200 AD over 170 years later! By the time these other "gospels" came around, the church had already put the Bible together. The first list of books that all churches should read was completed in 105 AD. The full list was complete by 135 AD, by a follower of John, Jesus' disciple, named Clement of Rome.

UNIQUELY LUTHERAN!

So like Martin Luther, we as Lutherans, we study the Bible and use it as the basis of all of our teaching. One of my favorite quotes from Luther is "Where the Bible speaks, we speak. Where the Bible is silent, we are silent."

But what makes us unique, even among other Christian churches is how we understand the Bible. We, like Luther, believe that the whole Bible, all 66 books has one purpose. To point us to Jesus and God's grace! Sure, the Bible has lots of good advice for how we treat one another and how to live our lives, but that only means something if Jesus lived, died, and rose again. As Luther said, "I see nothing in scripture except Christ crucified." In other words, it's all about God's grace!

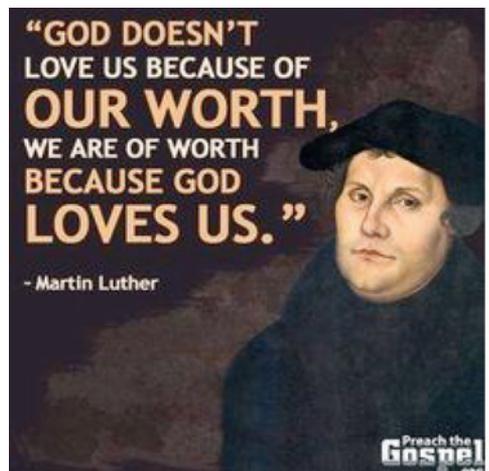
IMMANUEL: GIVE. REAL. GRACE.

And that brings us right back to where we started. Immanuel. God with us. Being a Lutheran means that you believe that God did come and walk among us. It means that you believe that it's God's work that has saved us. That he gave himself for us. He became real for us in order to give real grace to you and to the whole world.

Grace is what makes us at Immanuel different. It's not just a word. It's our story as Lutherans. It's what sets us apart. We preach God's grace. We live God's grace. We believe in God's grace. It's grace alone. Just like it was for Martin. To be Lutheran means to be all about God's grace in Jesus Christ.

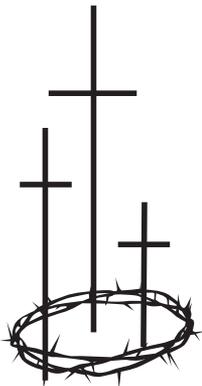
And that's why our ministry here is focused on Give. Real. Grace. It's who we are and it's what we do.

And we are pleased to welcome you into this same ministry with us!



*“Grace. A name for a girl.
An idea that changed the world.”*

*It's done it before.
It can do it again!*



Immanuel

Give. Real. Grace.

Immanuel Lutheran Church
Rev. Matthew Schultz

1850 Union Street, Schenectady, New York 12309
pastormcschultz@gmail.com
Office Phone: 518-346-1958