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 Reformation Sunday 2018

IS IT ENOUGH?

Teaching confirmation, to 7th 8th and 9th graders is one of my favorite things to do as a pastor. I am so thrilled, after spending years in overseas ministry, I now get to do it again at Trinity, Las Cruces. Let me just say it again, if you have any neighbors friends or relatives without a real church home, who might be interested to join our Christian ed. For all ages on Wednesdays, it's not too late. It's actually never too late for life-long learning in the Christian faith.

I love teaching confirmation, however, as a pastor-teacher I have to admit I'm a little obsessed with the question, *are they learning enough?*

More than once over the years confirmation students have heard me say "You've GOT to know these faith basics. The world isn't going to teach you. Schools, politics, work – you're probably not going to learn it there. We need the church to do what the church is uniquely called to do: teach, preach, and bless young and old with the sheer grace of Jesus Christ.

Yet, everyone knows there are certain things you've got to know to be considered a Christian, right?

Back in 1528, our great Church Reformer – not *founder* of the Lutheran Church, but *reformer* of the One Holy Catholic Apostolic Church (*we Lutherans still consider the Roman Catholic church to be our mother church*) Martin Luther visited the congregations in Saxony – the part of Germany where he lived - to do a spiritual health assessment. This was nearly 500 years ago, and Luther was horrified by what he found. I quote his words in translation from the German:

"Good God, what great misery I beheld!" [says Luther] "The common person, especially in the villages, has no knowledge whatsoever of Christian teaching. And unfortunately, many pastors are completely unable and unqualified to teach... Yet, everyone says they are Christians, have been baptized, and receive the holy Sacraments, even though they cannot even recite the Lord's Prayer or the Creed or the Ten Commandments. They live like dumb brutes and irrational hogs... O bishops! What answer will you ever give to Christ for having so shamefully neglected the people and never for a moment fulfilled your office?"

So Luther condensed the Basics of Biblical teachings into the Small Catechism, a little book meant for households to use for daily devotions. YOU can find the small catechism in the Daily Texts, you can find it free on line, and also in your Red Hymnal p. 1160...

What did Luther – who was a Roman Catholic monk and a Bible professor before he became a reformer of the Church,

What did Martin Luther consider to be the basics of the faith?

- Ten Commandments
- The Creed
- The Lord's Prayer
- The Sacrament of Holy Baptism
- The Sacrament of the Altar

- Blessings/Prayers/ Individual Confession

The Small Catechism is a collection of faith basics distilled from the Bible.

But then there are all the other wonderful aspects of Christianity that I want confirmation students to know.

So at night, just before falling asleep I might think, *Dear Lord, I never taught them about the Pieta, the Madonna with her crucified child in her arms.*

Can people really be educated Christians without being exposed to the brilliance and pathos of Christian art through the centuries?

(that's why in some churches, we've taken confirmation kids to art museums and Catholic retreat centers. It's amazing how Biblical stories come to life through different kinds of art)

And then over the years I have been appalled by the ignorance of people who have been part of MY confirmation program for two or three full years --

Oh I've failed ... you can't remember the names of Adam & Eve's 3rd son ???!!

[it's *SETH* - that son is important because he's a sign of great grace in their lives... there's grace in the Old Testament and in the New Testament)

The twin who was the ankle grabber? (*Jacob!!*)

How about the names of the midwives who obeyed God instead of the rules of their own Egyptian king? (*Shiphrah & Puah*)

How about the woman who was a great charitable giver who was raised from the dead in the New Testament? (*Come to our Bible Basics workshop after church today at 10:30 and you'll find out about some of these people...*)

This is our responsibility as church leaders and as Christian parents, grandparents, and godparents, to make sure the sometimes messy, gritty but also truth-telling stories of God's Word are told again and again among us.

So much to be done! So much to be taught!

I'll even ask my own grown up kids, "*Hey you remember the story of Stephen in the New Testament and how he just before he was murdered – he saw Jesus in a vision?*" And my own kids who averaged five hours a week in church as they were growing up they will say, "*Who? What?*"

It isn't enough.

They don't know enough.

We haven't taught them enough.

THEN I remember the first confirmation class I ever taught.

I was an intern pastor in Germany, I was assigned to help with a wild group of kids with names like Bianca, Ulrike, Stephan, Torsten, Brigitte, Hans-Peter, Dorothea, Christiane, Anton...

16 German thirteen year olds,

The one named Ulrike especially stands out. She was always poorly dressed, her mom reeked of alcohol ... if the mom showed up at all. Ulrike had a creepy looking boyfriend dressed always in all black leather, who DID always show up, waiting for her. When Ulrike started confirmation she knew Nothing, *NADA, nichts* about the Bible or the Christian faith. That particular confirmation class was only one year long, and I'm not sure Ulrike learned all that many facts about the Bible or the faith...

So the morning of Confirmation Day came, and everyone is dressed to the hilt, that is still the tradition in Germany -- the boys all in suits, the girls all in dark sophisticated dresses.

So wouldn't you know Ulrike's main concern the morning of her confirmation was -- she didn't have the right confirmation clothes!

Everyone else dressed to the hilt, there she stands in her usual striped shirt and ripped jeans.

Luckily, providentially - I may not have been the greatest confirmation teacher but, way back then I was young and slender and reasonably fashionable... so we found a corner to change in -- - no bathrooms in that old stone 12th century church – and I put on her shirt and jeans... which I could cover with my alb... and she wore my pretty spiffy new dress.

And you know, as the senior pastor put his hands on Ulrike's head to bless her and pray for her... it **was** enough.

Not what she knew

Not what I had taught,

But what Christ had given her.

A community where someone who needs a dress is given a dress. that's grace.

A wild book of blessings and strange stories and good news., that she could grow into. That's grace.

The mysterious sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion that would be hers - Ulrike's - forever. That's grace.

Lord, when have we taught enough, when have we learned enough, when have we done enough?

In a sense this is the question the Reformation is all about:

500 plus years ago, Martin Luther prayed, he confessed, he fasted, -- and it being another age, he even flagellated himself with whips and sticks to humble and discipline himself... he slept on the floor without blankets, he lived in poverty and always, always was asking the question, is it enough??

Until one day, he came upon these words from the Bible, from the book of Romans, these words which we read again today,

23 since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,24 they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus 25Whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith..." (Romans 3:23-25a)

And faith simply means grabbing on to God... like Shiphrah and Puah who grabbed on to God instead of Pharoah's law

Like countless parents who have placed the Bible into the hands of their children or grandchildren, like we did today

Like Ulrike who put on a new dress for her confirmation day.

None of us have actually done enough. There is so much more God wants all of us to learn and do and become.

But yes. It IS enough—

what Christ has died to give to us. That's what is all sufficient, and completely enough.

Sola Scriptura.

Sola Fide.

Sola Gratia.

Solus Christus.

Soli Deo Gloria. (Glory be to God alone.)

Amen.