

**Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> October 2022**  
**Glynde Lutheran Church**  
**Sermon on Romans 3:20-25, 28**

**Theme: “Will you be turned away at the door of heaven?”**  
**“There is no need to worry about Judgement Day!”**  
**(Reformation Day message)**

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***Introduction:***

Have you ever had the experience of being turned away from a particular place because of the way you were dressed? I have, *many times!* There was a time in my life in my youth when I virtually only wore jeans everywhere I went. And I can well remember *at least* a couple of occasions when I was turned away from a club or a dance because of the way that I was dressed....

Max Lucado, in a book of devotions of his entitled *When Christ comes*, relates an incident where this happened to him. Let me read to you what he says:

**I make no claims to being a good golfer, but I readily confess to being a golf addict. If you know of a twelve-step program for the condition, sign me up.... I love to play golf, watch golf, and, on good nights, I even dream golf.**

**Knowing this will help you appreciate the extreme joy I felt when I was invited to attend the Masters Golf Tournament. A pass to the Masters is the golfer’s Holy Grail. Tickets are as scarce as birdies on my scorecard. So, I was thrilled. The invitation came via pro golfer Scott Simpson. Each player is given a certain number of passes, and Scott offered Denalyn and me two of his....**

**So off we went to Augusta National Country Club in Augusta, Georgia, where golf heritage hangs like moss from the trees. There you find the green where Nicklaus sank *the* punt. The fringe where Larry Mize holed *the* chip, and *pipped* Greg Norman for the 1987 Masters’ Tournament. There fairway where Saranson hit *the* approach shot. I was a kid in a candy store. And, like a kid, I couldn’t get enough. It wasn’t enough to see the course and walk**

**the grounds, I wanted to see the locker room *in the clubhouse*. That's where the clubs of Hogan and Azinger are displayed. That's where the players hang out. And that's where I wanted to be.**

**But they wouldn't let me. A guard stopped me at the entrance. I showed him my pass, but he shook his head. I told him I knew Scott, but that didn't matter. I promised to send his eldest child through college, but he didn't budge. "Only caddies and players", he explained.**

**Well, he knew I wasn't a player. He also knew that I wasn't a caddie. Caddies at the Masters are required to wear white overalls. My clothing was a dead giveaway. So I left, figuring I'd never see the clubhouse. I had made it all the way to the door but was denied entrance (p. 55-56).**

And Max Lucado goes on to add:

**Many, many people fear the same will happen to them. Not at Augusta, but in heaven. They fear being turned away at the door... (p.56).**

Is that a fear you have? Do you maybe harbour a secret fear that this will happen to you when you reach the gates of heaven? I think that *perhaps* many people deep down wonder whether they'll make it, *whether they've been good enough to make it into heaven or whether they'll have the right credentials to make it into heaven*. I think that that's why so many people get distinctly nervous when the topics of death, or Judgement Day, or the Second Coming of Christ crop up.

Today is the day on which we in the Lutheran church celebrate the great Reformation of the Christian church in the early 1500's. This Reformation began with a Roman Catholic monk in Germany, a monk by the name of Martin Luther. In his early years as a monk, Martin Luther lived his life in terror of God: he believed that the only way to be sure of God's forgiveness was to confess every sin that he committed in the confessional.

Roland Bainton in his book on the life of Martin Luther writes:

***Martin Luther* confessed frequently, often daily, and for as long as six hours on a single occasion. Every sin in order to absolved must be confessed. *That's what he believed.* Therefore the soul must be searched and the memory ransacked and the motives probed...**

**He arrived at an...impasse. Sins to be forgiven must be confessed, *he believed.* To be confessed they must be recognized and remembered. If they are not recognized and remembered they cannot be forgiven. The only way out was to deny the premise. But that Luther was not...ready to do (p.41-42).**

So you can see from that brief description that Martin Luther was in terrible spiritual state, in agony of soul. His fear was the one that we have been talking about: that despite his best efforts, he would find that the door of heaven was barred to him.

Well, Martin Luther's salvation came in his study of the Bible. Martin Luther was appointed to lecture on the Bible to the university in Wittenberg, Germany, and this involved him in close study of the Bible, and in particular Paul's letters to the Galatians and to the Romans.

Martin Luther spend ages puzzling over what Paul meant by "the righteousness of God", or as he understood, "*the justice of God*" (Rom. 3:21-22 RSV). Here are Martin Luther's own words:

**I greatly longed to understand Paul's Epistle to the Romans and nothing stood in the way but that one expression, "the justice of God", because I took it to mean that justice whereby God is just and deals justly in punishing the unjust.**

**My situation was that, although an impeccable monk, I stood before God as a sinner troubled in conscience, and I had no confidence that my merit would *satisfy* him. Therefore I did not love a just and angry God, but rather hated and murmured against him. Yet I clung to the dear Paul, and had a great yearning to know what he meant.**

**Night and day I pondered until I saw the connection between the justice of God and the statement "the just shall live by his faith". Then I grasped that the justice of God is that righteousness by which through grace and sheer mercy God justifies us through faith.**

**Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through the open doors into paradise... (Ibid., p. 49).**

Martin Luther came to understand that the gift of God's forgiveness is offered freely to us all, and is received by trusting in Jesus as our Saviour.

Jesus, God's Son, suffered and died on the cross and took on himself the blame and the punishment that we deserve from God. Through Jesus, we all may have God's forgiveness and live in God's family as His forgiven children. The only catch is the catch with all gifts: it has to be received....

And that where faith comes in: through faith, *through trusting in Jesus as our Saviour*, we continue to receive the gift of God's forgiveness, the gift that was first given to us when we were baptised. The great motto of the Reformation sums all this up: "gratia propter Christum per fidem", or for those of you who aren't Latin scholars, "by grace, on account of Christ, through faith" or summarising this using the jelly bean illustration:

- \* **It's free** ("by grace)
- \* **It cost God plenty** ("on account of Christ")
- \* **We have to receive it** ("through faith")

Martin Luther sums up what Jesus came to mean to him in the words of the explanation of the Second Article of the Creed in his Small Catechism:

**I believe that Jesus Christ...is my Lord. At great cost he has saved and redeemed me, a lost and condemned person. He has freed me from sin, death, and the power of the devil – not with silver or gold, but with holy and precious blood and his innocent suffering and death.**

**All this he has done that I may be his own, live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness.... (Growing, p. 89).**

None of us need ever fear that we will be turned away by God at the gates of heaven, *as long as we are trusting in Jesus as our Saviour!*

Let me read to you some passages from the Bible that gave Martin

Luther peace of mind with regard to this, and which have given Christians down through the ages great peace of mind:

**\*But now God's way of putting people right with himself has been revealed** (*Lit. "now a righteousness from God has been revealed"*). **It has nothing to do with the law.... God puts people right through their faith in Jesus Christ** (*Lit. "This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ"*).

**God does this to all who believe in Christ, because there is no difference at all: everyone has sinned and is far away from God's saving presence. But by the free gift of God's grace, all are put right with him through Christ Jesus, who sets them free.**

**God offered him, so that by his death he should become the means by which people's sins are forgiven through their faith in him....**

**For we conclude that a person is put right with God** (*Lit. "justified"*) **only through faith, and not by doing what the Law commands**(*Romans 3:21-28*).

**\*Now that we have been put right with God through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ** (*Romans 5:1*).

**\*There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus** (*Romans 8:1*).

And I love the description of God's people in heaven given by John in the book of Revelation. He has a vision of heaven, and he describes it this way:

**After this I looked, and there was an enormous crowd – no one could count all the people! They were from every race, tribe, nation, and language, and they stood in front of the throne and of the Lamb, dressed in white robes and holding palm branches in their hands....**

**One of the elders asked me, "Who are these people dressed in white robes, and where do they come from?" "I don't know sir. You do", I answered. He said to me, "These are the people who have come safely through the terrible persecution** (*life on this earth, under the assault of Satan*). **They have washed their robes and made them white with the blood of the Lamb"** (*Rev. 7:9-14*).

## **Conclusion:**

Let's finish up. I want to finish by reading to you what happened to Max Lucado at the Augusta Masters Golf Tournament. He writes: **Speaking of being turned away at the door, did I...tell you the rest of the Masters Golf Tournament story? I'm sure you are dying to hear whether or not I made it into the locker room. Well, wouldn't you know it, I did.**

**The day prior to the tournament, the golfers play an exhibition round on a par-three course. It is customary for the golfers to give their caddie the afternoon off and invite a friend or family member to take his place. Well, Scott invited me to be his caddie. "Of course, you'll have to wear the white overalls", he explained. And, of course, I didn't mind. Snicker.**

**That afternoon, when the round was over, I made my way to the clubhouse. And through the same door, walking past the same guard, I stepped into golfer's inner sanctum. What made the difference?**

**One day I was turned away, the next I was welcomed. Why the change? Simple, I was wearing the right clothes (p. 62).**

None of us need worry about being turned away at the gates of heaven, *as long as we are clinging to Jesus as our Saviour, and receiving God's gift of forgiveness!*

When we are clinging to Jesus as our Saviour, we are clean before God. No longer are we wearing the grubby clothes that we have dirtied through our sins, but rather as we trust in Jesus we are wearing "white" clothes, so to speak. That's how God sees us as we trust in Jesus and receive His forgiveness.

No, you and I need have no fears about being turned away by God from the door of heaven, *as long as we cling to Jesus as our Saviour.*