



## *We Are Beggars Only*

In this Reformation month of October, it is fitting to talk about the beginning of our identity as “Lutheran” Christians and of Martin Luther, who pointed others to Christ and His precious Word. Martin Luther had many qualities and gifts. But perhaps his most valuable or important was his writing. Before his burial in Wittenberg a traditional death mask was made of Dr. Luther, and that the sculptors went a step further and also made a casting of his hands. The cast shows his hands fixed in their natural position, which interestingly had the left hand flat (as in holding down a piece of paper), and the right hand in a writing position.

If you realize how much Dr. Luther wrote, this would be very understandable. He was a prolific writer to say the least - catechisms, booklets, hymns, lecture notes, sermons, letters, the entire Bible translated into German. If you’ve had the opportunity to see an American edition of Luther’s works, there are now around 60 volumes that have been translated into English. I can’t begin to tell you how much is left to be translated from the German and Latin.

When one has written that much, and written powerful, world-changing stuff, you would probably want to pay close attention to what that person wrote on his deathbed. As he lay dying, almost in the very shadow of where he had been baptized into Christ and life eternal 62 years earlier and on the verge of entering that full joy begun at his baptism, what was he thinking? What thoughts, what insights would he leave behind to those he cared for? And indeed, Luther’s family and friends found a scrap of paper in his pocket that Luther had written some of his last thoughts. A few lines that ended with these words: “We are all beggars. This is true.” I love that story.

On his deathbed, with eternity at hand, Luther reminds himself and us that we are all beggars – those who can cling only to the grace and promise of God given to us in Christ Jesus for salvation.

It is at the deathbed when things can become very simple, and very clear. Your perspective on life can become very focused. With death and your eternal destination right before you, there are no more distractions from the temporary stuff of this world – no plans, no concerns about the cares of life in this world. Eternity is before you. What’s going to happen?

It is at that time when we sadly can do what we’ve often done throughout our life, and that is to look inside ourselves. Look at and review how we lived our life. Were you a good enough husband, wife, father, neighbor? Were you faithful enough to God? Did you truly love Him? Were you truly repentant? How will you stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ? Will you go to heaven or hell? Have you done enough? Oh, how the devil loves to torment in those moments, to get us to look not at Christ but inwardly, at ourselves and thus our failures, in order to hopefully kill faith and hope.

But by the mercy and love of God, who would not abandon Luther or the rest of His children to such self-deceit, we are made to see ourselves as we really are – beggars before the Throne of God. The Law of God strips away all pretense and pride. Before the presence of God, we know that we are sinners, and deserve nothing but God’s judgment and condemnation. All we can do and rely upon is the mercy of God.

We are beggars only. That is the reformation truth and gift given to us that we celebrate every day, and particularly this time of the year. As Luther prepared to go before the judgment seat of Christ, he would not look to his many accomplishments or faithfulness to God, rather he knew and confessed that he was a beggar only – a sinner in need of the grace, mercy and forgiveness in Jesus Christ. That was the faith he professed with his dying breath, the confession that leads to life eternal through the mercy of Jesus Christ.

Today could be your last day on this earth. You don’t know. You could find yourself on your deathbed, about to face God’s Judgment Seat. Will you look to yourself and what you have done, your faithfulness? Or will you rely solely upon the mercy of God in Christ as a beggar? Your Reformation heritage and gift given to you is that by God’s grace you are enabled to realize that you are a beggar only, one who depends solely upon the grace and mercy of God given to you in Christ Jesus – and that mercy is truly what you can depend upon! Trust that fellow beggar, for it is most certainly true!

*In Christ’s service and yours,  
Pastor (Beggar) Love*