

Christ Alone

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[0 : 00] and for reading for us. And as you've heard already, we're in this series at St. Salus celebrating the Reformation from 500 years ago. We've got other events going on in the church calendar.

We've got this light party on Halloween, 31st of October, for children to come along to, perhaps bring friends to. For adults, we've got our big guest event for the term, really, the Monk's Tale Play, coming on the 15th of November to bring friends along to.

So in our sermon series, we're looking at these five solas. Solas just means only. And the five solas were kind of five key truths that were rediscovered 500 years ago by the church, by Christians, as they rediscovered God.

Because actually, it's as we learn how God has opened a way for us to be right with him that we get to know God ourselves. It's this God, the God of the gospel, who is the true God.

So we've looked at a few of them already, faith alone, grace alone, scripture alone. And this morning, we're thinking about Christ alone. There'll be a lot of overlap with things we've already looked at, but Christ alone. So let's pray, and let's ask for God's help as we look at his word.

[1 : 08] Father God, we thank you for the Lord Jesus Christ, his majesty, his mercy, the truth that was rediscovered about him.

And as we dwell on these truths today, by your spirit, we ask that you will open our eyes to see you, enable our minds to grasp more clearly who you are, and change our hearts that we might live for you always.

In Jesus' name, amen. I don't know if any of you have come across this comedy, The Good Place. It's, oh, someone has. It begins with this girl, Eleanor Shellstrop.

She wakes up in the afterlife. She meets Michael, who seems to be in charge around there. And he explains that she's going to the good place and not the bad place.

The good place is a place where happiness is eternal and everyone is good all of the time. And she's going to go there because she's lived a good life. If she'd not led a good life, she'd go to the bad place.

[2 : 12] She asks about the bad place. He says, let me play you something from the bad place. She hears all this screaming. She says, that does not sound awesome. So Eleanor goes to the good place. The problem in the comedy series is that Eleanor doesn't deserve to be in the good place.

There's been a mistaken identity. And so she's terrified that she's going to be found out. But whether or not you get into the good place when you die is judged by a scoring system.

And I've just got an example on the screen of what that looks like. You get points in your life for good deeds and you lose points for bad deeds. So you probably can't see the detail there from the show. But there are some examples.

If you step carefully over a flower bed, you get two points. If you spit out chewing gum onto the pavement, you lose points. Remembering your sister's birthday gets you 15.02 points.

Genocide loses you 433,115 points. So I wonder what you would add and how you would score up people's good deeds and bad deeds.

[3 : 12] The good place taps into the folk religion of our country. The idea that if there is a God and if he is concerned about how we live, when you die, he'll kind of have a scoring system to weigh up how good your good deeds were, how bad your bad deeds were.

And there'll be a good place for good people and a bad place for the bad people. It's what lots of people think today. And it's not so different from what the church across Scotland and across Europe thought 500 years ago.

But if you take that point scoring system from a good God, none of us is good. As soon as you've lost any points, you can't make up for them by doing more good stuff because doing the good stuff is just your duty anyway.

That's what we should be doing. And the truth is, as you see in the good place show, if you put any of us into the good place, we would just spoil it anyway as the people we are.

So on our own, we have no hope. Now the reformers went back to the Bible looking for another way. And that's our subject today. So first of all, the foundations of Christ alone.

[4 : 30] Now we could have gone almost anywhere in the Bible, rightly understood to see this, because the whole Bible points us to this truth, Christ alone.

We had Philippians chapter three read, written by the apostle Paul, a deeply religious man who had been a good works doer, but who would have been respected by everyone around him for that as a pure, holy Jewish man.

So he talks about the background he's from in verse six, the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews. He says he was a Pharisee, so from a particularly holy group of the Jews.

In verse six, he says, based on the law, he was faultless. And then he says this in verse seven, but whatever were gains to me, I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.

What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things.

[5 : 33] I consider them garbage that I may gain Christ. So when Paul talks about garbage there, he's not talking about bad things. He's talking about his good things, garbage, so that he can take hold of what Christ has offered him.

And that's key in verse nine, the reason why, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.

In other words, Christ offers us righteousness as a gift that we just take from him when we put our trust in him. If we have faith in him, we're united to him so that whatever happens to him happens to us.

And he died on the cross for sins so that he took the penalty for our sins and rose again to new life because he's perfect. And so in him, we get given eternal life that lasts forever.

Christ alone means there is nothing that we add, nothing that we can add to what he has done. And it also means there's no other way to be right with God. In John's gospel, Jesus says, I am the way and the truth and the life.

[6 : 48] No one comes to the Father except through me. The apostle Peter says this in Acts 4.12, Salvation is found in no one else for there is no other name under heaven by which we must be saved.

And in 1 Timothy 2, verse 5, we read this, For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man, Jesus Christ.

When do you need a mediator? When do people go through mediation? It's because their relationship is broken down, isn't it?

That's why we need a mediator. They're in a dispute. And the mediator stands in the gap. Often, I used to be a lawyer, you'd have the two parties in different rooms. The mediator goes between, giving each side of the story, trying to bring people back together.

You know, this is Theresa May going off to Brussels, representing us, standing in the gap between us and Brussels, trying to mediate. It's the person who stands in the gap.

[7 : 49] And our relationship with God has broken down. We've alienated ourselves from him. So Jesus Christ has that unique job. He can mediate between us, because he's a man, and God, because he's God.

And only he can do it. Now, when it comes to God, the person who plays that role is the priest. Under the old covenant, the people of God knew that we need a priest, someone to step in between us and a holy God.

And the priest has to offer blood sacrifices to make us right with God. And those were shadows to prepare us for the work of Jesus Christ. Here is Hebrews chapter 10.

It's on the screen from verse 11. Day after day, every priest stands and performs his religious duty. He's talking about the old covenant priest in the temple. Again and again, he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.

But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. And since that time, he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool.

[8 : 58] For by one sacrifice, he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy. Just picture that Old Testament temple.

When you walked into that temple, people traveled miles and miles, traveled for days to get there on pilgrimage. You got there, it was like an abattoir. There's animals everywhere. It stinks. They're killing animals all day, every day to try and deal with people's sin. You wonder, did any of the priests ever say to their priests as they were doing it, this isn't working, is it? It's not working. But now, it's all been fulfilled. And from the day you first become a Christian, your sin no longer ever has any status on your standing before God.

We've been made perfect forever in God's sight. And so Jesus has sat down. His job is done once and for all. So that's the foundation of Christ alone in the scriptures.

[9 : 58] Secondly, we're going to think about the implications of Christ alone. The medieval church had realized none of us is good enough for God on our own, but they said this, they said, well, Jesus Christ came and he lived this perfect life and the merit of that wonderful life moved God the Father to make a new deal for people.

And the new pact that God has made with people is basically if you do your best, God will do the rest. He will kind of make up for your messing up as long as you're kind of doing your best.

So to make up for that messing up bit, the church had developed these traditions, a whole religious system that allowed you to go through a cycle back into grace if you'd committed a sin and fallen from grace, as they would have said.

So that when the reformers discovered Christ alone in the Bible, that religious system was shattered for them. It came crashing down. So we're just going to think about a few of the specifics for a few minutes, but as I've said in previous weeks, I'm at pains to say, the Reformation has got nothing at all to do with sectarianism and being anti-Catholic and discriminating against Roman Catholics.

That is a horrible thing. And it blights the church today, that history. There are people who are not interested in Jesus because of what the church has done in how Roman Catholics have been treated.

[11 : 23] That is a horrible thing. But the reason we need to think about the ways that some of the traditions that are developed in the church were wrong are because they're widespread today in Roman Catholic churches, but they're also widespread in Anglican churches.

And for many of us, they can become part of our spiritual lives. So we do have to reflect on the implications of the Reformation. So we'll do that in two ways.

Just thinking about Christ alone means there's no other mediator and there's no other sacrifice. First of all, there's no other mediator. Remember that verse, there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man, Christ Jesus.

So that makes the language of calling the church leader a priest today very unhelpful, doesn't it? I'm an Anglican minister, a bishop has laid hands on me and I've been ordained as a priest in the Anglican church.

But the New Testament never uses the word priest to describe a church leader. It talks about Jesus as our priest. It talks about all of us being a priesthood together, making God known to the world.

[12 : 34] But your church leader is not a priest. All of us, we're free from that. Any of us, all of us can have access to God individually ourselves through Jesus Christ without any other mediator.

There was another kind of mediator in the medieval church as well and it was the saints. Most of my family are Roman Catholic. So when I was growing up, if something went wrong, my grandma always knew who you pray to.

If I was going on a journey, you pray to St. Christopher about your journey. I had a little key ring with him on. It made me feel better. It made me feel safe as I went on journeys. If I lost something, I had to pray to St. Anthony.

And do you know what? In my experience, it worked. I lost things. I asked St. Anthony. He kept finding things for me. In fact, if you speak to Kathy, my wife, she wishes St. Anthony hadn't been quite so good at answering my prayers because it might make me more careful today about where I put my wallet and my phone and my keys.

But anyway, if you lost something, St. Anthony, he was your man. Pray to him and that's you sorted. Can you see what that is? It's superstition.

[13:52] Superstition dressed up in Christian language. And it diminishes Christ. He has freed us from that so that any of us can pray straight away whenever we need to to God as our Father by the Spirit through Jesus Christ.

Nor the mediator. I just want us to reflect on another dimension of this. Just something to reflect on and be discerning about. And that's how we view worship at church and our worship leaders at church.

So music is a wonderful gift from God. We've had a great time singing this morning. I've been loving it. As we sing songs with music that accompanies the truth that we believe about God, God uses that to bless us.

He builds us up in our faith. He teaches us as we sing to one another. He glorifies himself. He teaches us to pray as we sing. All of that is brilliant.

But in churches today we sometimes hear the language of the band leader being the anointed worship leader and people saying that the anointed worship leader leads us into the presence of God.

[15:05] I don't know if you've heard that language. I've certainly heard it a lot. That they lead us into the presence of God. Now a well-led church service or a well-led set of songs might help us engage with God.

But we must never feel that we've got to be in a particular place with a particular style of music even led by a particular person or particular group of people to come into the presence of God.

That was life under the old covenant. You had to go to a place. You went to the temple to meet God. But not now. Through Jesus Christ any of us can draw near to God anywhere anytime.

In fact we're urged to do it in the scriptures. To draw near to God wherever we are anytime. No other mediator. And we also need to remember there's no other sacrifice.

So in the medieval church church was all about the sacrifice. The table was called the altar. And they believed the bread and wine changed to become the body and blood of Christ.

[16:13] So the priest could then represent the sacrifice of Jesus to make atonement for the sins of the people that day or that week. So the whole service is going on in Latin.

At the key moment a bell would ring and the priest would say *hoc est corpus meum* which means this is my body in Latin. But that's where we get *hocus pocus* from.

Because to the village onlookers that's what they heard. In fact for lots of the priests who didn't know Latin that's probably what they said. But again of course those beliefs are still widespread today.

In plenty of Scottish Episcopal churches the bread and wine are raised up by the minister in homage. And any bread and wine that's left over at the end of the service gets kept in a box so that if anybody needs visiting during the week they couldn't get to communion they can be brought the special bread and the special wine because the priest prayed on that bread and wine so it's been changed.

The elements have changed. But Hebrews 10 says we're free from all of that. Jesus Christ's sacrifice was once for all to liberate us from that.

[17:29] So when we have communion we're not offering anything to God. We'll have it later we'll come to the Lord's table. He ministers to us as we have bread and wine. We receive from him as his spirit strengthens us in our faith as he gives us that visible word reminding us of what Jesus did for us and that he's coming again.

So those are a few of the implications of Christ alone. And thirdly we're going to think about our response to Christ alone. So I've got three things under this third heading. Three things. Humility assurance and courage.

So first of all humility Jesus says no one comes to the Father except by me and so there's no other way to be right with God other than through him.

And in today's world believing that is a big taboo isn't it? Because it's believing that you're right and everybody else who believes anything different is wrong. So you might be thinking does believing such an exclusive claim is it bad for society?

Does it make people arrogant? thinking we've got the truth and nobody else has? You might be here as a guest not a Christian and thinking that to yourself as we look at this.

[18 : 45] But if you think about it everybody has exclusive beliefs. If you think that every religion leads to God that's an exclusive belief because you believe that there's a particular kind of God who doesn't really mind how you approach him as long as you use one of the established religions you basically if you think every religion leads to God you think that Christians and Jews and Muslims who think their way is the way are wrong to think that.

You've got an exclusive belief. If you're a moralist you have rules in life that you think make you a good person and you look down on other people who don't keep your rules.

If you're a libertarian or a liberal perhaps more common in the west end of Glasgow you look down on the moralists because you think how dare they have their rules that they think make you a good person.

So you still think as a liberal you're the one who's right. We've all got exclusive beliefs and the question is which set of exclusive beliefs could actually produce the kind of peaceful loving people that we need in our world.

Now this belief Christ alone is a belief that there is nothing good in me to have made me right with God but God set his love on me not because of anything in me but because of him because of his love.

[20 : 06] In 1 John 4 verse 10 we read this this is love not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

What a humbling truth to believe. So you don't look down on anybody else and the result of believing that is in the next verse in 1 John 4 dear friends since God so loved us we also ought to love one another.

That is that we display unconditional sacrificial love to our fellow human beings and our fellow believers because of what God is like.

So our first response to Christ alone is humility. Secondly it's assurance. Knowing that Christ's work has done everything needed to make you right with God leads to peace and joy.

Assurance that it's all paid for and dealt with. Romans chapter 5 therefore since we have been justified through faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand and we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

[21 : 16] We have assurance. Again thinking about my family my auntie died a few years ago. She was devoutly religious and we lived near my auntie at the time and my uncle didn't live near so he phoned my dad about my auntie dying and my dad was out so I took the call and my uncle said to me you know auntie Jane's died it's awful news it's his sister and he said Martin it's really really important that you help me we've got to get a priest there as soon as we can to get the last rites read.

And you see what's going on there that is so sad that somebody could have lived a life trusting Jesus and think as they die something else has to be done.

Presumably he believes in purgatory that something had to be done to minimize her time there. I remember a minister just after I'd become a Christian baptizing somebody and me saying is that the biggest triumph of being a Christian minister?

And straight away he said no Christian funeral biggest triumph of being a Christian minister is a Christian funeral because there's assurance joyful assurance and it's that assurance that makes us a singing people.

We sing songs about our rescue and how Jesus has done it all for us. We sing songs about our king and his majesty that he would come and die for us that we would have nothing to fear as we die there would be nothing more to do.

[22 : 52] So that's the joy the assurance humility and assurance and lastly courage courage to contend for this truth for it is so priceless and so necessary for every human soul it is a truth we must be willing to suffer to make known to fight for it in the church and to sacrifice for it in the world.

The apostles knew that the early church knew it but to see it in action we're just going to reflect on what it cost the reformers to bring this truth back into the church.

Last week we thought about the reformation in Scotland and people sometimes say the reformation in Scotland was a bottom up reformation it started on the ground by people inspired by the preaching of men like John Knox with fire in their belly and it caused riots and uproar and the church was reformed from the bottom.

In England it was reformed from the top down and it's relevant for us just as an Episcopal church because we owe some of our heritage to what happened in England.

We've heard about Cranmer already this morning a group of bright young men including Cranmer started reading Luther's writings as they were being smuggled into England they were going to the White Horse Tavern in Cambridge which started being called Little Germany because of Luther's writings and all the beer that was being drunk and another of the guys there was Hugh Latimer who became Bishop of Worcester when Thomas Cranmer became Archbishop of Canterbury.

[24 : 23] Now Cranmer was given the authority to write a new prayer book for the church knowing that every single church in England would have to use his prayer book. So in 1549 he wrote his first one and he changed it from Latin into English then he revised it in 1552 and most of what we still have in what's the 1662 Book of Common Prayer that St. Silas is committed to in terms of its theology most of that was written by Cranmer in 1552.

He wrote some articles of religion that again were committed to here that were an expression of Protestant reformation of the church just bringing the truth of the Bible into the heart of the church and Cranmer knew as we've already heard from Emily really helpfully that hardly any of the priests leading the churches were converted so he produced a book of sermons and they had to read them out every week so they were reading these Christ-centered sermons in churches throughout the land.

It was the 16th century equivalent of going multi-site with kind of live projection because Cranmer had written what everyone was hearing and in the communion service he ensured that nobody could be in any doubt that the sacrifice was not being offered again.

So if we just bring up the words that we still use once a month for our communion service this is Cranmer's writing about Jesus. He made there not here where we're having communion he made there by his one oblation that is offering of himself once offered we're not doing it again a full perfect and sufficient sacrifice oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world.

We're remembering it we're not doing it again. So we owe Cranmer a great debt for what he wrote into our church life. But just a few years later the young king Edward VI became sick and died and his Roman Catholic sister Mary came to the throne and Mary did what she could to reverse the effects of the Reformation known as Bloody Mary in the last four years of her reign 288 people were burnt at the stake for their Reformation beliefs.

[26 : 38] The most common reason was people who wouldn't accept that the bread and wine had changed into the body and blood of Christ. Of those who were burnt at the stake four were bishops 21 were ministers 55 were women 4 were children.

Cranmer was arrested after a long trial and imprisonment he recanted under pressure in weakness and on the 21st of March 1556 he was led out in Oxford to be burnt to death and as he did that he dramatically plunged his right hand into the flames because that was the hand with which he'd signed his recantation to confirm to the crowd that he was wrong to do that.

His colleagues Bishops Hugh Latimer and Nicholas Ridley were also burnt at the stake in Oxford as the flames rose Latimer turned to Ridley in front of the crowds and said be of good comfort Master Ridley and play the man by God's grace we shall this day light such a candle in England as I trust shall never be put out.

So friends these were the immense costs of rediscovering Christ alone and handing it on so that we ordinary people today could know it and treasure it.

and as evangelicals this is our heritage. In churches today too many of us are evangelifish. We might privately believe the Bible but when people talk to us there's no clear distinction and there's no backbone.

[28 : 13] What would it look like for you to be a courageous Christian today? Maybe it would be as simple as just telling colleagues at work that you're a Christian and inviting them to a monk's tale.

Just putting a marker down with your colleagues that you're a Christian. Opening up a conversation. Could we be inspired by all that Christ has done and those who suffered that we might hear of it that we will be people marked by humility marked by joyful assurance and marked by courage?

Amen. We're going to respond by singing together so just a moment of quiet and then the band will come up and lead us. In the second song the children will be returned to parents.

To be continued...