



RAM 2:16



Bishop's Post August September 2017

“We must obey God rather than men!” This sentence featured at important turning points in the Church.

In Acts 5, 29 it is said by the Apostle Peter. The religious leaders had decided to prohibit him from preaching in the Name of Jesus. Should he obey? The answer was clear: We will rather obey God. As a result, he received 39 whip lashes as punishment. But still he was not prepared to keep silent about Jesus Christ.

One thousand one hundred and fifty years later these words were uttered again, this time by a Frenchman, Valdes. He too was told that he should not preach - this time by Church leaders, because he was a lay person. Lay people were not supposed to preach. When he uttered this sentence, I regard it as the beginning of the protestant reformation. It took a further three hundred and forty years till it became a global movement under the leadership of Martin Luther, but it started here, around 1180.

Valdes grappled with the issue of authority. Who or what is the highest authority in the Church? For the Church at that time it was clear. The pope, councils, doctrines and scripture were all seen as equally binding, but since the doctrines were much younger than the teachings of Paul and Peter, they received more attention. The same is true for the pope: Although having the same authority as Peter and Paul, the pope was physically present and could be asked about and he could respond to current issues- and thus his words and opinions weighed much more than the words of Peter or Paul.

Valdes however studied the New Testament and quickly picked up where the Church was lacking: proclaiming forgiveness and a new life following Christ. When he was refused permission to spread this message, he stated: The Authority of Scripture supercedes that of the Church and Pope.

Despite the fact that all Lutheran theologians would agree to this, in times of conflict, all too often Luther's opinions weigh heavier than scripture. Even more ironically these “Lutheran teachings” often are not even Luther's, but second or third generation interpretations of Luther's teachings. Luther, like Valdes, believed that all theological interpretation is to be measured by scripture, and definitely not by Luther.

“We must obey God rather than men.”

However, it can be extremely difficult to discern whether a teaching is indeed God-inspired or purely human opinion. When theologians argue and Churches split, all parties believe that they are obeying God rather than man. Unfortunately often it is only history that shows where God was at work.

Therefore this statement of Peter and Valdes should not be seen as a battle cry of someone who knows that he is right. Rather it is the commitment of Christians who are aware that it is all too easy to confuse God's Word and human wishes. This statement should always be accompanied by the prayer: Lord, am I still on the right track?

I pray that I will have the courage to challenge those who firmly believe that they proclaim “pure doctrine”. But more importantly, I pray that I will have the courage to allow others to question me and my motives.

We celebrate 500 years of Reformation. It is not about Luther, nor the Lutheran Church - it still is all about Jesus and that he is proclaimed and followed!

Horst Müller

News from the Church

St Peters by the Lake has elected **Pastor Dieter Trümpelmann** from East London as their new pastor. He is to start there in January 2018. Let us pray for him and his family as they now go through the time of farewell and change. May God strengthen and bless them!

Pastor Olaf Giesecke from **Germiston** has been given a pastor's post in the Church of Hannover. He will return to Germany on 27 July 2017. We were shocked to hear that his father in Germany died unexpectedly of a heart attack at the beginning of July - just three weeks before the return of his son. We pray that God will comfort this family!

We rejoice with **Northrand** congregation that **Pastor Wilko Hunger and his wife Jutta** did receive a visa so that they can commence their work in South Africa on 1 September 2017. He currently is a pastor in the circuit Wesermünde in the Church of Hannover. May God strengthen them during this time of farewell in Germany, and may they soon settle in their new home!

On **27 August all Lutheran Churches in South Africa celebrate 500 years of Reformation** together at the Tshwane Events Centre at the Pretoria show grounds, from 9h00 to 12h30. May this be a highlight for thousands of participants. Can we as ELCSA (N-T) come with a thousand members? I challenge you!!

Synod preparation meetings are planned as follows:

Central and Northern Circuits: 5 August in Midrand

Southern Circuit: 12 August in Pietermaritzburg

Easter Circuit: 26 August in Piet Retief

Apart from the synod delegates the treasurers and congregational councils are invited, but also any person interested in learning about what is happening at synod.

Synod is planned for 14-17 September in Hermannsburg. The theme: **Fear not ... I have called you by name.** We request congregations to pray for this event. At this synod the following people need to be elected: Treasurer of the Church, President of Synod, Ordained member of Church Council and the Deans. May God guide the elections.

eQuip 2018 is now in the planning phase. The theme is: **“Alive!”** During 2017 we focussed on 500 years Reformation. This retreat invites us on a journey of discovery of the living God and his living word - the power behind the reformation. We have a God who gives life and wants us to live. Is this not in conflict with all the Old Testament laws? How can this God be seen in times of injustice and corruption? Can we be “alive” when church is divided? These are some of the questions that we will be dealing with. You are invited to attend!