



THE CURE  
Romans 3:19-28  
Reformation Sunday  
October 27, 2019

Our Saviour Lutheran Church  
West Lafayette, Indiana  
Rev. Dr. Steven E. Albertin

He only wanted the opportunity to debate his fellow colleagues on the faculty of the University of Wittenberg. He was worried about what was happening in the church. The sale of Indulgences seemed to imply that God's forgiveness was for sale instead of being the free gift of God's mercy in Jesus Christ.

So (legend has it), on All Saints Eve, October 31, 1517 Martin Luther posted the 95 Theses on the Castle Church door in Wittenberg, Germany. He simply wanted a debate. However, it turned out to be "the straw that broke the camel's back," the spark that ignited an explosion that began a revolution: the Protestant Reformation. It splintered the Christian Church in the West. The rest, as they say, is history.

That event and the dramatic changes it precipitated, we remember today. It is important to remember this event because the Church has always been tempted to forget the Gospel, the good news of God's unmerited love for the world in Jesus Christ, and replace it with some "other Gospel." The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the very center of the church. Without it, the church is no longer the church. The church must always keep on checking its message. The church must always be in a process of reform, always reforming the reformed.

Drawing on Paul's words in today's second reading, Luther reminds us that we are justified by grace through faith because of Christ. "Justification by Faith" is a radical answer to a simple question. The simple question is this: What do I **have to do** to be saved? Answer: Nothing! Why? Because God is the one who saves and has done that in Jesus Christ. We **get to** believe that good news. We cannot justify ourselves to God. We always fall short. God is the one who justifies. God is the one who makes us right.

However, "Justification by faith" can easily become an empty phrase and a hollow slogan. So that we can better appreciate the significance of "justification by faith," I want to tell you this story about Martin.

Martin was a very sick man. He is afflicted with a disease that is destroying his life, the dreaded . . . **Yahbuts Disease**.

But Martin didn't know it. He thought his **Yahbut's Disease** wasn't a disease at all. He thought it was a natural part of life.

The signs of Martin's **Yahbut's Disease** began to appear when he was a young boy in grade school in "Yah . . . but . . ." conversations.

"Martin!" his mother shouted. "Did you push this cookie jar over and make this mess on the kitchen floor?"

"Yah," Martin replied, **but** someone had just freshly waxed that floor. When I stepped on the chair to reach the cookies, the chair slipped. **Yah**, I made the mess, **but** it's the slippery floor's fault and not mine."

"Martin!" his father shouted. "Did you leave the TV room in a shambles when you went to bed last night?"

"Yah," Martin answered, "**but** I was going to clean it and remembered that you told me I had to go to bed at 8:00 and it was just 8:00 when I thought of it. So, I thought I had better get to bed like you said."

Martin had lots of these "Yah . . . but" conversations with his parents. Martin always had an answer. Martin always had an excuse. He always found some way to justify himself. Martin had **Yahbut's Disease!!!**

Martin's teachers also got involved in these "Yah . . . but" conversations. His teacher asked, "Martin, is it true that you don't have your math work done in time?"

"Yah," Martin replied, "**But** it's not my fault. You see, my mother made me clean up the cookie crumbs from the kitchen floor and that was just when I was working on my math assignment. If you don't believe me, you can call her and ask!"

Martin now had a full-fledged case of **Yahbut's Disease**. Martin had an excuse for anything and everything. His justifications were always perfectly logical. Martin was never wrong and always right. Just ask him!!!

The problem was that this never-being-wrong-and-always-being-right got to be an obsession with Martin. It was taking over his life and would destroy him, if he was not cured of this dreaded disease.

One day Martin bought a new sports car. His friends, who knew anything about sports cars, were shocked!

"Martin! Why did you buy this car? Don't you know that it's a lemon! Everyone knows that. Martin, you have made a big mistake!"

“Is that all you know about sports cars?” Martin sneered back. “I’ve read all the magazines on this particular model. This one has got the best rating. It gets more miles to the gallon. It handles, accelerates and corners well. It has more interior room. It has great resale value. It . . . “

Martin stopped for a moment and thought and thought and thought. Then Martin, thoroughly afflicted with **Yahbut’s Disease**, made a regrettable decision.

“Get in.” They got in and away Martin sped in his new sports car. Up and down the streets he flew driving like a maniac, weaving his way through traffic, squealing around the corners and screeching away from the stoplights. Martin was having the time of his life showing off his car, justifying his choice, proving his friends wrong, defending his freedom, . . . when the familiar sound of a police siren blared behind him.

“Martin, I’m going to have to ticket you for speeding and reckless driving.”

“**Yah** officer, **but** I was just giving my friends a ride to show them what a great choice I made and . . .”

“No ‘**Yah**. . . **but**’s’ Martin. No excuses. You must to appear in court before a judge at 9:00 a.m. Monday morning to either pay your fine or contest this ticket.”

Martin was shattered. He knew that the only honest plea he could make was guilty! But people afflicted with **Yahbut’s Disease** can not admit their guilt. They can’t even say the word.

Monday morning arrived and Martin appeared before the judge. Standing next to him was his court appointed defense attorney. Martin did not even want an attorney. He wanted to defend himself. He wanted to show the judge how the officer was wrong and he was right.

It got even more confusing when the attorney asked him a question that caught Martin completely off balance. “Martin, are you guilty? No excuses, just tell me the truth.”

Martin seemed baffled. “**Yah**, I got caught speeding. I was going a little fast, **but**, you see, I was just showing my friends the new sports car I bought and what a good deal it got and . . .”

“Stop it, Martin!” interrupted the attorney. “This is no time for excuses. Face it, Martin. You got caught. You are guilty.”

But Martin shot back, “What kind of defense attorney are you? You’re supposed to defend me and prove my innocence, but you want me to admit my guilt without even trying to defend me?”

Silence. Then the attorney said the word that Martin did not want to hear. “Guilty.”

“This is crazy! No, I won’t do it.”

Then the attorney softly said, “I will defend you, but not like you think I should. No more **‘yah . . . but’s**. No more excuses.”

“No way! Once the judge hears me admit my guilt, I’m doomed. He will surely fine me. He may even put me in jail. No. I can’t do it. I can’t risk it. This is no defense strategy! Who do you think you are? Do you have some inside connection with the judge that I don’t know about?” sputtered Martin.

“I do,” said the attorney, not blinking an eye.

“Martin,” demanded the judge, “how do you plea? Guilty or not guilty?”

Martin was still unsure. Should he or should he not? Could he really trust the strange strategy of this utterly odd attorney? Could his promise be true?

“Martin, I don’t have all day. You are holding up the court.” The judge was getting impatient. “Martin, guilty or not guilty?”

“Can I trust him? Insider? Special connections with the judge?”

“Ahh, emm, sir, . . . I am . . . *guilty* . . . as charged.” Somehow, Martin managed to get *THE WORD* out.

Then the judge said something that utterly shocked him. “**Yah**, Martin, you are guilty, **BUT** . . . I am going to declare you innocent of all charges.”

Martin could not believe what he had just heard! “**Yah . . . but!**” That had always been his line, but now the judge is saying it! What is going on here?

“But how can you declare me innocent of all charges after you have heard me admit my guilt?”

With an equally puzzled look on his face, the judge responds, “But Martin, didn’t you know? Your defense attorney has inside connections. He is . . . my boy! Anyone who has my boy on their side, is OK with this court! **Yah**, Martin, you are a traffic offender, **but** you also have my boy as your defense attorney!

That's all that matters. You can stop the excuse making. You do no longer need to defend yourself. You are acquitted of all charges. Case closed."

Such words are powerful. They change people's lives.

At work the next day, Martin's boss stormed into the office and shouted, "Who turned in this sloppy piece of work?"

Silence. Everyone knew who was responsible. It was Martin. But Martin always had excuses. It was never his fault. Then the workers heard words that they thought would never fall from Martin's lips, "I did, sir."

That weekend Martin entertained some of his friends at his home. One of them sarcastically quipped, "Martin, where did you get this new TV?"

"From Best Buy."

"What did you pay for it?"

"700.00." Martin said sheepishly.

His friend heard these words with unrestrained glee. "You paid \$700.00 for that set? I can't believe it! You got taken! I got one just like it at Walmart for \$100.00 less!"

Martin stiffened. His face turned red. His friends expected another round of "**Yah . . . but's.**" But Martin remembered those words of the judge and his son and relaxed. "It sounds like you got a really good deal, better than mine. Congratulations!"

It was round 20 of a "**Yah . . . but**" argument with his wife, when Martin said something his wife had never heard him say before. "I'm sorry. Please, forgive me."

Martin was free. The deadly hold of **Yahbut's Disease**, of sin, had been broken. He was a new man. Those words he heard that day in the courtroom changed his life.

That is the message that Luther sought to recover for the church. That is the message that drove him to post those 95 Theses. That is the message that needs to be at the center of the church's life and mission in every generation. Christ has cured us of **Yahbut's Disease**. We no longer need to make excuses. With Christ standing there next to us the ultimate Judge of the universe smiles . . . we are free, and the church is the church.