

I am a believer!

Sermon on Reformation day.

⁴ Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.^[a] ⁵ Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. ⁶ These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. ⁷ Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ⁸ Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. ⁹ Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

"I believe 100% in God!" When people say something like that, you can usually assume that this 100% faith is actually not 100% at all. On the contrary most times, if people say something like that it is precisely because their Faith is challenged. It may even be that such 100% faith is a cry for help. Yes, I would like to believe 100%. But I can't. But a confession of faith can also be very different. So for eg. A person may say: "I have been a believer all these years. I was baptized and confirmed in this church. That is why I know that I am a believer." But it may also be that someone has decided, under extreme pressure or even in extreme danger, to be baptized, to be a Christian and to believe in the Triune God. Do all these things mean that we have true faith in God? Do all these things mean that we have true faith in God? In the Bible I see that God demands complete and unfailing faith from us humans. God demands that each of us believes personally. I cannot expect that church or anyone else to do this for me. We can also find many examples of strong faith in God in the Bible. Abraham believed in God and was prepared to sacrifice his only son Isaac to God. Job believed in God and was able to hold on to his faith in the living God despite trials. We learn this true faith from no one less than God himself. With our God there is no half-heartedness. With Him everything is complete and whole. With Him everything is 100% When He created the world, He did not make a single dummy or a single animal, with a fail or a blemish. NO single creature was left half finished. From the smallest animal to the largest whale, everything was exactly as He had imagined it and as His Word said. He made everything perfect. It was about vibrant life! About true joy! Above all, about true love! And all of that without any limits whatsoever!

Because God does not do things half-heartedly, Jewish martyrs have died for thousands of years with these words on their lips: Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! ⁵ And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength!

Today we gather again around these holy words and we worship the one who makes no mistakes and who always goes all out. But is our faith in the Almighty God genuine? Martin Luther dealt with this question very intensively. For years he observed how people tried to buy forgiveness of sins with money. For years he tried to force himself to believe. Yes, what about our faith? Is it genuine, or does it only reach as far as the church door? Sadly, so often our faith turns out to be a sham and a deception. This becomes clear when I would rather sit in front of the television than listen to God's word or pray. It becomes clear when I live among many friends who all do not believe in God and I am left speechless and cannot witness to them. It also becomes clear when I put my trust entirely in my bank account and my own strength and do not think at all about God's power, with which he made the whole world. And how strong will my faith be on that day when I will say my farewells for good and must leave this earth? Yes, when it comes to our faith, we can be sure of one thing: it is neither genuine nor does it keep its promises. And yet God demands from us what He Himself gives. The whole thing! You should love God with all your heart and soul! And also with all your strength! God does not want half measures. He does not

want believers who confess with their mouths and speak a completely different language with their thoughts and actions. God does not want believers who just pay him a visit once a year to the Christmas service and otherwise want nothing to do with him. God does not want believers who, for the sake of tradition and good manners, put a few cents in the collection and once a year put flowers, picked up from the gas station, on the altar. God wants you! With everything you are! Your whole person! All your wishes! All your dreams! But that is exactly what we don't want at all. We would much rather be God ourselves. We want to decide for ourselves what we should and shouldn't do! And if we do anything good at all, it is only because we want to be praised like little gods. Oh no! And 10 thousand cries of woe about us! Because we are not what we think we are.

And then Jesus came!

In Him there was no falsehood at all. There were no half measures either. He really loved God with all his heart and with all his strength. For Him it was really about the whole thing! And the wonderful thing is that God came to us humans in Jesus. Not only did Jesus turn his face completely to God. He did this precisely for us and for our sake. Yes, actually he turned his face COMPLETELY to us at the same time! Jesus showed this clearly time and again! Even when he followed his commission to come to us humans. Then he was not far above our lives and our everyday lives, but was right in the middle of it and among us! The whole Jesus! The complete Jesus was meant to be for us! And when God comes to us humans through Jesus, then, as we already know him, He does not do things by halves. He goes all out. That is why Jesus does not just touch the intellectual and spiritual upper classes of his time, but everyone! That is why Jesus is not just there for the very pious! Not just for those who can understand him. He is even there for the people who break his commandments. Even for those who ultimately wanted to do everything to kill him. Jesus' love, which finds its ultimate goal in his death on the cross, is about all people and it is about the whole person. We should be fully included in God's love and saved again. That is neither a half-truth nor a deception. That is how God did it through Jesus! And that is exactly what Martin Luther rediscovered and proclaimed with 95 theses on the church door in Wittenberg!

Now we are here. We with our HALF-TRUTHS and God, who gives himself so completely for us through Jesus. God does not want to simply leave this contradiction as it is. Even today, God comes to us completely. Through the Holy Spirit, he even lives in us. And the same Spirit also sets clear anchors that are connected to him for eternity. One anchor is baptism, with which he gives us a share in God's sonship. The other anchor is Holy Communion, with which we are physically connected to Jesus. In these places, despite our many contradictions and imperfections, we are completely united with God! We can hold on to this, even if Satan wants to make us feel insecure with all his loud interjections. We can hold on to it in our everyday lives. This faith is really suitable for everyday life and permeates everything. Even when we say with our last breath:

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! 5And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength! Amen