

Isaiah 43:1-13

The Five Solas of the Reformation
Soli Deo Gloria – For the Glory of God Alone

All that we are, say and do

He was a man of great talent. His ability to play the organ was undisputed, but they felt the music he composed was too flashy and fancy, too complex for church. He found it difficult to find places of work for any length of time that would allow him the freedom to write the music that was in his soul. For a time, he worked for a Duke who did not place restrictions on him, but even that did not last forever. In his own lifetime his music was not revered or recognized for the genius it took to write such music. When he died in 1750, his music was considered old-fashioned, and had been forgotten by most people. It was not until almost 80 years later that his music was rediscovered.

The organist and composer was Johann Sebastian Bach. It is hard for us to even imagine that someone whose music all of us have heard whether we know it or not, but whose name is always recognized, and whose music, if not beloved, is always respected, could have struggled so much. What is significant for our discussion today is that Bach understood his music to be a gift from God, that God made music through Bach's writing. Whenever he began a new piece, he bowed his head and prayed. "Jesus, help me show your glory through the music I write. May it bring you joy even as it brings joy to your people."¹ When he was finally satisfied with what he had written he would end with the letters SDG. Soli Deo Gloria – For the Glory of God Alone.

Can you imagine or understand that everything you do, how you live, speak, relate, the gifts that you bring to the world, are all there for the glory of God alone?

I was reading an article the other day about igens. This is what they are calling the generation that has grown up with iPads and iPhones, essentially with technology at their fingertips. It has become understood that how kids relate to each other and the world around them has completely changed. Our grandchildren and great-grandchildren are experiencing the world in ways that most of us cannot really get our minds wrapped around. Instead of hanging out with friends, many are in their rooms, happier to text friends, than be with them. I have seen many times when friends are in the same room and rather than speaking directly to each other, they text. Even in a crowd of people they can keep their conversation private. No more need for whispers into another's ear's. Just text.

¹ <http://www.christianity.com/church/church-history/church-history-for-kids/j-s-bach-soli-deo-gloria-to-the-glory-of-god-alone-11635057.html>. Accessed October 28, 2017.

Rather than go to a movie with friends, they watch movies on their tablets and then discuss the movie with twitter or snap chat. Their conversations limited to a few lines at a time rather than ongoing face to face conversations where you hear the intonation of the voice and the see expressions on the other's face while saying it.

Now I know that many young people have a balance of technology and being with others, and I am very grateful for apps that allow me to video chat with my granddaughter nearly every morning as she gets ready for daycare. But the research is suggesting that brains are changing, depression is rising, and people are becoming more isolated in this age of technology at our finger tips.

It is also creating an even more self-centered culture than ever experienced before. I often hear people bemoan the fact that church attendance is declining. So are the service clubs and sports clubs that once brought kids and adults together in community. The more technology has become a part of the culture the less we interacted directly with each other.

Just think of the time people have spent in front of radios and televisions over the past decades instead of being together. Now that people can carry their electronic devices with them, interaction between people becomes even less.

Even when I travel on planes, pretty much everyone has earphones on and they are tuned into their phone or tablet. It is easy not to even introduce yourself to the person in the seat next to you. Why would you? It is seldom that you end up in conversation with them. No need to invest any time in one another.

Again, technology in and of itself is not the problem, what has become the challenge is to realize that we are not self-sufficient, the gods of our own destinies. When the focus is always on ourselves we tend not to care about our neighbour and we have come to a point where God is not even someone many people have heard about.

In our scripture reading from Isaiah, the people are living as exiles. They are Hebrew people living in Babylon. They have turned away from God and as a result find themselves in captivity. I sometime think that our electronic devices have us in captivity. But they and we have these stories handed down to us from over the centuries that remind us that when we remember God, God is there. The prophet in Isaiah is telling people scattered about, that God who created them, who formed and redeemed them are his own. God has called them by name and they are his. They are never forgotten. We are never forgotten. Even when we have strayed far from God, God wants to gather us together. God wants to be Immanuel, the name given for "God with us."

What is so crushing about what is happening in our culture today is that it is easy for us to separate ourselves from each other and from God. We are prideful. We may not see ourselves that way, but it is so just by virtue of the fact that most of us think we are able to do life without much help from others. We get up, get ready for the day, go to work, or

volunteer, or spent time alone, or with others, and rarely give God any thought throughout the day.

We may get up and say prayers, or say grace before a meal, and end our day with prayer, although even the reading of scripture and the prayer life of a whole lot of people is hit and miss, but to think of everything one does as giving glory to God?! That does not happen for many. God is something you take care of at specific points in the day or week whether planned or by happenstance. But living our lives to the Glory of God, knowing that our lives, our very existence is because of a loving creator - that does not happen often.

Our pride, our thinking that we are fully capable of dealing with what comes our way, is in contrast to what it takes to understand God's working in our lives. To acknowledge that takes humility. The humility to know that we are not the center of our universe, God is. That though we need to have the ability to get through a day, we do not have to do it alone, that God is there and willing to go through floods and fire with you. In other words, through your most difficult moments. We are not promised a life without floods and flames, struggle and challenges that feel overwhelming, but we are promised that God, the God who loves us because we are precious in his sight and honored, that God is with us.

In the second half of the reading from the prophet, in a court room like drama, in which the world assembles to decide who is really God, the God of Israel call his people to witness for him. God declares, "I, I am the Lord, and besides me there is no savior. I declared and saved and proclaimed, when there was no strange god among you; and you are my witness, says the Lord. I am God, and also henceforth I am he: there is no one who can deliver from my hand; I work and who can hinder it?" (NRSV Isaiah 43:11-13).

We have God with us. God who created us because of love, who thinks we are precious in his sight, and wants to honor us, and we take little notice, and rarely declare as Bach did – for the glory of God alone!

Let me encourage you to begin to see your life as a gift from God, not just some of the time, but all of the time. To see yourself, what you do, who you do it with, the way you talk, work, live, as a declaration of God's glory. It will change you. But don't leave it there. Let others hear you say, "To God be the glory!" You may not use those exact words, it may be other words, like "who I am is a reflection of God in my life", or "I give thanks for the way God is using me in a certain situation". There are ways to let people know that God is your focus without having to shout it.

But in all you do, begin to see God at work in you and in others. Then in your heart and mind, and even using words out loud, you can declare, "Soli Deo Gloria – for God's glory alone." Live this. Breathe it. Be changed by it.

SDG – Soli Deo Gloria! Amen.