August 1st – Justified by Faith

"Therefore, we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law."
(Romans 3:28)

As a first-year seminary student, I'm sure I thought there were a great many things I understood about the Christian faith. One or two semesters in seminary is about all it takes to show you that there's still a lot you don't know. In was in that first year that my pastor handed me a book comparing the doctrinal commitments of Protestants and Catholics. At that time, there were pastors and other Christian leaders stepping forward to say that both groups should be doing evangelism together.

As I read the book, I began to understand that there is one major difference between Protestants and Catholics – a difference so big that it sparked the Reformation. Catholics (and many others) believe that salvation is earned through a mixture of faith and good works. In other words, one's entrance into heaven is based on whether or not they did enough work to get there. The Reformation was born out of the conviction that salvation is gained ONLY through faith in Jesus.

Martin Luther was a former Catholic monk who spearheaded the Reformation. Today's verse was a monumental revelation to him. Though he had been taught all his life that the way to be justified before God was good works, he learned that "a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law." Don't get me wrong – good works are a daily part of our Christian faith. But we don't do good works in order to be saved – we do good works because we ARE saved through faith alone in Jesus.