



1

Five hundred years ago this coming Tuesday it all started. Martin Luther took out pen and paper, then hammer and nail, and the Protestant Reformation had its beginning. I'm grateful — as I've told many of you: if I hadn't grown up Lutheran, I probably wouldn't still be Christian — it's just kind of the way I'm wired. I'd guess you're grateful too — after all you're here!



2

We're here to remember the predicament Luther found himself in — frightened by a God he imagined to be angry and vindictive. We're here to remember how his study of Scripture, and the movement of the Holy Spirit, led him back to the truth — That the love of God in Christ has the power to set believers free. We're here to remember how his courage and determination caused him to fight for the rest of his life to change the prevailing beliefs and practices of the Christian Church — The whole western branch of the Christian Church. We're here to remember that for five centuries now, those who consider themselves Lutherans have explored how God's gifts of love and grace can change hearts, and shape lives. We're here to remember — and I'm glad for that.



But we're also here to look forward, and that's what excites me most about today.

It seems hard to get the church excited to look forward these days.

We've heard a lot about the decline of participation in religious life in our time.

When outsiders look at the church (some of whom used to be insiders), they think of us as:

Judgmental — quick to criticize others (particularly outsiders!)

Hypocritical — extolling Jesus but not living up to the life he calls us to live.

Too Political — using political structures to force our beliefs on others.

It is heartbreaking to realize that so many people think this of us.

Especially since these descriptions actually run counter to what it



That's the bad news, but the good news is much more profound: First; Martin Luther lived in a time when the church had lost its soul.

It had, way back then, become judgmental, hypocritical and far too political.

And second: Luther understood how to guide the church into renewal and new life because that's what God had done for him. It happened late one night, he said, when he was studying alone in a tower at the monastery where he lived.

It was the summer of 1517 — probably some time in July.

All of sudden he realized that he had it all wrong.

God isn't an angry judge, who delights in punishing sinners.

No, God is a loving God, willing to suffer and even to die in order to reconnect with us.

Determined to set us free from the need to earn love and forgiveness.

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This, Luther understood, is the central message of Jesus. And it needs to be the central message of any faithful church. Luther's experience was so profound, that he became convinced of God's power to renew.

So he set out to change the church as he knew it. If God could make this great of a change in Luther's life, perhaps God could also make this great of a change in the church he loved.

The power of God's Word.

The presence of Christ in the Sacrament.

The movement of the Holy Spirit among God's people. Love and forgiveness potent enough to transform lives.

These were the realities Luther believed changed him.

He also believed they would change the church.

And, in fact, they did.

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The church confessed its tendency to be judgmental, and committed itself to a ministry of love and grace.

We took a hard look at our own hypocrisy, and committed to living with honesty and integrity.

We re-evaluated our involvement in political and economic life, and focused on nurturing faith and hope among God's people.

This is what we commemorate today.

Not that we get it better than everybody else.

Not that we'll always do it perfectly.

But that through Martin Luther and the other reformers, God gave us a glimpse of what a loving, honest, discipling community looks like.

We strive to live up to this every day.

To be a church where we are all welcomed into God's love, just as we are.

And sent into God's world, to be a reflection of Christ.



As we look forward, what does this mean for you and me?
 What does this mean for our church?
 If we are the church that opens its heart to the movement of the Holy Spirit, and trusts where God is leading us,
 What do we hope God will accomplish through us?
 In your weekly newsletter you will find a handout, inviting you to think about how the Holy Spirit might be at work.
 How do you hope the Holy Spirit will reform your life?
 How do you hope the Holy Spirit will reform your church?
 Jot your ideas down on the handout you'll find in your weekly newsletter.
 And if you'd like to, remember Martin Luther (and the day he posted his theses on the door of the church) by coming forward and posting your theses to our Wittenberg Door.



The Lutheran Church has a rich and faithful history. There are many aspects of our life together that have blessed believers throughout the centuries. Chief among them may well be our belief that whenever the church goes astray — whenever you and I go astray — God comes to us, helping us see the error of our ways, and drawing us back to what we are meant to be. This is what it means to be a reforming people. This is what we commemorate, 500 years into this journey. We pray that the ministry Luther began in the sixteenth century might continue among us today. The ministry of allowing the Word of God to set us free from what binds us, and to release us for lives of faithful love.

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Saint Peter
LUTHERAN CHURCH

Take It Home!

Let's keep the conversation going. Our hosts will have a 7-day devotional guide for you as you leave today.

Question for this evening's conversation: "From what does my faith, or my relationship with God, free me?"

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I hope you'll continue thinking about this in the coming days. Exploring what changes God might want for your lives. Considering the new and faithful directions the Spirit might be calling us all to embrace. As you leave today, our hosts have a 7-day devotional for you. Take some time with it in your home, and let God's word guide you through your daily life.

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Saint Peter
LUTHERAN CHURCH

The Last Word

A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none.

A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.

The Freedom of a Christian
Martin Luther

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On this day we almost have to allow Martin Luther to have the last word. In his influential book, "The Freedom of a Christian," he wrote: "A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all." This is how Martin Luther experienced the Christian faith. It is what he wanted for the church of his day to experience. It is what he wants for us today as well. May God grant this to us all. Amen!

Saint Peter
LUTHERAN CHURCH


Hymn of the Day

Please stand as we sing today's
Hymn of the Day.

1st Service: *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*
(page #18)

2nd Service: *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*
(page #22)

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Please stand with us as we sing today's Hymn of the Day. It is, as you might imagine, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God."


First Service: page #18
Second Service: page #22

Saint Peter
LUTHERAN CHURCH

St. John 8:31-36

³¹ Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; ³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." ³³ They answered him, "We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying 'You will be made free'?" ³⁴ Jesus answered them, "Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. ³⁵ The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there forever. ³⁶ So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed."

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8:31 Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; 32 and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." 33 They answered him, "We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying, 'You will be made free'?" 34 Jesus answered them, "Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. 35 The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there forever. 36 So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed."