



Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. **AMEN**

505 years ago, on the eve of All Saints Day, a day we now know as Halloween, October 31, 1517, a young Roman Catholic Priest by the name of Martin Luther nailed on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany, a list of 95 theses, or statements, and requested a meeting of the church leaders to discuss and debate the substance of these 95 theses.

At that time, Martin Luther had no idea what drastic changes this simple act would bring upon the church. Posting those 95 theses began a chain reaction that resulted in the events that we know today as the Protestant Reformation. And we as Lutherans celebrate and observe this last Sunday in October as Reformation Sunday, the birthday of the Lutheran Church. That is why you see the red paraments this morning. Red is the color of Pentecost and special church events. I love this day because it is one of two days during the year, I get to wear this beautiful stole my children bought me for my ordination.

So, who exactly was Martin Luther? Sometimes when I ask that question to our youth they say the civil rights leader from a long time ago, 70 years. Of course, they are thinking of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Many surveys have been done about who were the most influential people of the past millennium. Dr. King would not appear on those lists. They report that Sir Isaac Newton for his work in science, physics and astronomy tops the list. Then we see Martin Luther who brought religion and education to the common people and is as we know, credited with laying the foundation of democracy. He also standardized the language for the German people. Then come the Wright brothers, for their invention of the airplane and principles of aerodynamics.

So, you see, Martin Luther holds an important place in the history of the world. But he did not get there without great personal struggle. He grew up in a day when the church pictured God as an angry, vindictive God. It was believed that God was watching and waiting for us to make a mistake so that He could punish us with eternal suffering in hell.

The Roman Catholic church taught people to fear God, fear to them meant to be afraid, not the way we look at fearing God today as respect. The fear the church taught led the church to control people. The church leaders were to be submitted too and so the church gathered great wealth and power for the Pope in Rome and the Roman Catholic church.

I do want to say that the Catholic church of Luther's day and the Catholic church today are very different. Over the last 505 years, they have gone through their own reformation. In 1962 some of you might remember Vatican 2 after which the services no longer had to be in Latin and many other changes came down to the Catholic people. I have always felt that after that time, the Roman Catholic church was becoming more Lutheran, all the time.

Although Catholics and Lutherans still have many theological differences, we are moving closer and in the same direction. In our first communion classes this last month we have talked about some of these differences. I tell the children that they are fortunate that they are not taking first communion classes in the Catholic church because they would have to learn about 7 sacraments instead of just our two of Holy Communion and Holy Baptism. The other big difference is the way we look at Holy Communion. The Roman church believed in transubstantiation where the wine and the bread are actually changed by the power of the priest into the body and blood of Jesus. Our Lutheran tradition tells us that it "just is" the body and blood of Jesus. It does not change, but rather it just is, by the mystical power of God.

Well, back to Luther. As a young man he decided not to follow in his father's footsteps and become a lawyer. Rather, he became an Augustinian monk and was ordained while he went on to earn his PhD in Bible and Theology. He was a bright man and also learned Hebrew, Greek and Latin. He then became a professor at the University of Wittenberg in Germany, a new and upcoming school for the Roman Catholic church.

Even with all this education, Luther did not find what he was really looking for, and that was a way for him to make sure he did not spend all of eternity suffering in hell. W He longed to be right and pleasing to God. Some of you might remember that he spent a lot of time in the confessional booth recounting all his sins. No matter how hard Luther tried to be good and obedient to the commands of God and the Roman church, he just could not do it. He searched endlessly for the peace of God and a sense of assurance and rest for his troubled spirit. He was a sinner and he felt he could never be good enough to earn a place in heaven, he could never do enough to be right with God.

Have you ever felt this way? No matter how hard you try, you cannot stop doing the one thing that you want not to do? If we were little Luthers we would not minimize our sins as if they don't matter to God. We would realize that sin is what separates us from God. That folks is why God hates when we sin. It causes us angst, sometimes harm and it moves us away from God.

In 1514, Luther as he was preparing a sermon on Romans 3 had a life changing experience. His eyes were opened to the truth. Our epistle reading today was what Luther was studying when the "gates of heaven were opened". In Romans 3:19-28 we read, "but now, apart from law the righteousness of God has been disclosed, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God [they are not justified (put

right with God) by God's grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. . . . For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law." Folks this is the truth that Luther now saw, the truth that will set us all free.

Luther wrote about this truth to the Roman church and to us today. The truth of the Gospel is that we are not saved, we are not put right with God by, being good, or obeying the law, or going through all the outward rituals of religion, or anything else we may try to do to make ourselves worthy before God.

We are saved solely by the love and grace of God. The grace of God is given freely to us through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We simply need to believe that is true.

What a life changing revelation. Luther discovered this truth and wanted to share it with everyone, as well as to have the Roman church's thinking come in line with this truth. But as we know the church leaders were not wanting to hear any of this banter. They considered Luther a heretic and outlaw and tried hard to stop him from teaching this newfound truth. They would go to any means to stop him, even giving a mandate to the people that he was a wanted man, wanted dead or alive.

The Roman church was not able to squelch Martin Luther or his teachings. The result of his proclamation of the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ resulted in the Protestant Reformation and the beginning of the Lutheran Church.

As Lutherans we still subscribe to his teachings today. As you can see on the Lutheran rose banner hung on the baptismal font are some of the Solas that he taught us.

<b>Sola Gracia</b>	Grace alone
<b>Sola Fide</b>	Faith alone
<b>Sola Christos</b>	Christ alone
<b>Sola Scriptura</b>	Scripture alone
<b>Sola Deo Gloria</b>	To the glory of God alone.

Through the Scriptures we too can discover the truth that God sent his Son Jesus into the world not to condemn it, but rather to save it. God did this because of His great love for us. Our Old Testament reading this morning in Jeremiah said, "I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel. I will be their God and they shall be my people. They shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord, for I will forgive their iniquity and remember their sin no more." Jesus Christ has erased our sin so that God has no record nor memory of our sin.

I pray that you all will leave here this morning with the knowledge and assurance and certainly that God loves you. He has chosen you. And by the grace of God through Jesus Christ, you are forgiven and made a child of God. And that you will know the truth that God has set you free for an abundant life here on earth and that the promise of eternal salvation will give you joy.

So as children of the reformation, may we all know that same assurance of God's love and grace that opens heaven to us. This truth comes from Christ alone. **AMEN**