



**Pastor's Devotional, Special Edition
500th Anniversary of the Reformation!**

On October 31, 1517, Martin Luther sought to confront corruption in the medieval church by nailing his list of concerns to a church door in Wittenberg, Germany. To raise funds for St. Peter's basilica, the pope sent a representative named Tetzel to sell "indulgences" with the catchy phrase: "*When the coin in the coffer rings, the soul out of purgatory springs.*" Having personally discovered the Gospel of grace, Luther hoped to convince church leaders to restore the biblical basis for salvation. As summarized by the Apostle Paul:

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (Ephesians 2:8-10).

We are saved by grace...through faith...for good works—this is our good news! On this 500th Anniversary, Protestants and Roman Catholics remember Luther's courage with gratitude (Though Luther was excommunicated, Roman Catholic doctrine became more biblically based).

Of course, there are somber aspects to this anniversary. Luther did not intend to divide Christendom. But as the newly-invented printing press churned out thousands of pamphlets challenging Roman authorities, Luther's ideas accelerated the breakup of Europe into contentious religious denominations and warring nation-states—an era of horrific bloodshed.

Looking back on the last 500 years, it's painfully clear that most of the Reformers and their successors were blind to another aspect of corrupt doctrine—the church's refusal to follow Jesus in how it handles power. Protestants get credit for restoring the biblical message of salvation, but like the Roman church, our ancestors assumed that Jesus would have them use the government to force their version of Christianity onto others (the "peace-church" minority such as the Amish were the exception). 500 years after Luther, Christianity in Europe has been discredited due to the cruelties inflicted on non-believers through power-politics. In Germany, a tiny percentage of the population follows Jesus. America has a different history. But we also run the risk of discrediting Jesus if we succumb to using political power to compel people to practice our faith or embrace our values.

Instead, let's pursue the often-ignored aspect of reformation! Guided by scripture, let's commit ourselves to following the loving kindness of Jesus. On this Reformation Sunday of 2017, Church in the Wild is worshipping God by serving the needs of our neighbors. More profoundly, let's continually critique ourselves: "How we can BE the church instead of just going to church?"

And let's take Jesus at his word when he challenges us to "love your enemies" (Matthew 5:44). While it's human nature to fear those who practice different religions (or who profess no religion), we demonstrate Jesus' divine nature when we are kind and respectful—especially if they are unkind or disrespectful to us. If we demonstrate the love of Jesus, we will be much more effective in sharing his Gospel.

Let's keep the Reformation going!