

Reformation 499

In one year, we will join with fellow Lutherans around the world to mark the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation. On October 31, 1517, a young monk and professor named Martin Luther posted 95 Theses (statements for debate) on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Saxony (Germany). Though never directly debated, God used those Theses to set in motion a series of events that led to what we now call the Reformation. This Reformation brought about a series of changes in the church, making the Bible available to common people in their own languages, and preaching the clear Gospel of Jesus Christ, by whose death and resurrection our sins have been forgiven and in whom we are saved by God's grace through faith alone.

Wow! That's a lot to swallow in one gulp. And we'll be unpacking all that during the lead up to next year's anniversary. So that we can see and hear the story of Luther and the Reformation, I invite you to join us as we host several "Luther Movie Nights" in the months ahead (the first of which will be this October 30th).

But this anniversary is about more than a man and a movement. It's about the Word of God. The theme our Synod has chosen for this celebration says it well: "Reformation 2017: It's *Still All About Jesus!*" And at this summer's Convention, the delegates adopted Resolution 15-04A, which states:

"Therefore be it *Resolved*, That the members of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) commit to grow in faith themselves, personally and corporately, by reading through the entire Scriptures in 2017; and be it further *Resolved*, That as we grow in the Word ourselves we would entreat the Lord to make us humble and faithful witnesses to the power of Christ's forgiveness and mercy in a world that badly needs it."

That's quite a challenge, to read the entire Bible in just one year, but it can be done by reading three chapters and one Psalm every day. Some of those chapters can be pretty long, and others can be unfamiliar and confusing, so it's not an easy task. How do we find our way through and start to make sense of it all?

Luther gave us a road map to the Bible when he wrote the *Small Catechism*. That simple document which describes the basics of what every Christian needs to know and believe also helps us understand the text of the Bible by giving us the basic 'plot.' Each Bible passage is usually one of three things: it shows us how to live (as the Ten Commandments do), it tells us what God has done (as in the Apostles' Creed), or it shows us how we communicate with God (as the Lord's Prayer teaches us to come to Him with our requests, and the Sacraments point to where God delivers His forgiveness to us).

So I invite and encourage you to plan for this Reformation 500 challenge, and prepare to read through the entire Bible in just one year. (Schedules will be provided, one starting at the beginning of the Church year, the First Sunday in Advent, another starting at the beginning of the calendar year, on January 1). Figure out now when you can set aside time each day to read God's Word, and perhaps start reading through your favorite book of the Bible during that daily time slot to get yourself into that daily discipline. Take the time to review and renew your relationship with Luther's *Small Catechism*, so you have this 'roadmap' readily available as you set off on a wonderful journey through the Word of God!

God's Word is our great heritage And shall be ours forever;

*To spread its light from age to age Shall be our chief endeavor.
Through life it guides our way, In death it is our stay.
Lord, grant, while world endure, We keep its teachings pure Throughout all generations.
(Lutheran Service Book 582)*