

Reform Our Hearts, O God

In October of 1517, almost 502 years ago, a Catholic priest named Martin Luther made the decision to talk to the church body that he loved and claimed as his own and to point out the ways in which this church was failing to preach the gospel. His list of concerns included the fact that ordinary congregants were only allowed to eat the bread at communion (with the wine reserved for the priests), that the Bible wasn't available for ordinary folks to read (meaning the church had complete power and control over the Word of God), and the church's teaching that God is perpetually angry, and that it is our job to do good deeds (giving money to the already wealthy church, that is) to make God love us and have a chance to experience eternal and perfect love.

This was the beginning of the Reformation—the time period throughout the 1500s and 1600s during which church life and structure around the world was “re-formed”. As Lutherans, the Reformation plays an important role in our life because it was during this time period when our denomination was established. Thanks be to God!

The Reformation was the beginning of much more than Lutheranism—it sparked the creation of many other Christian denominations, and even sparked change in the Catholic Church. It unleashed a movement of reliance on God's grace and knowledge of scripture that paved the way for some of the anniversaries that we celebrate as a church in 2019—namely, the fiftieth anniversary of the ordination of women in the ELCA.

With so much to celebrate as the catholic (that is, universal) church, the Reformation calls all of us to a new awareness of our own role as “re-formers”. As we remember the bravery of Martin Luther and so many others who over 500 years ago were willing to speak about the liberating word of God in the face of power and corruption, we remember that it is this kind of risky, sometimes scary, truth-telling that God calls all of us to do in the midst of a broken world. With the gospel in our hands and on our hearts, we are called by God as today's church to speak truth to power and to speak boldly of God's love and promise of new life for all peoples. This is an extremely challenging thing in the midst of a terrifying and broken world, and this is why each year in the fall we commemorate the anniversary of the Reformation—to remember what it looks like when this kind of bravery and complete trust in God is enacted in the world (it can end up changing everything!).

So as we enter this new season of remembrance of the 502nd anniversary of the beginning of the Reformation, let us also pray that God might continue to reform our very hearts—that we might be equipped to boldly speak a word of grace and love in this world.

Peace, Pastor Marissa Becklin