

# LUTHER 500

Evangelicals Concerned Fall Weekend / Ocean Grove, NJ, Oct 6-8, 2017

## Introductory Lecture

Growing up to be 34 years old seems a *long* time while you're living it. To your parents, on *your* 34<sup>th</sup> birthday, the day when you were born doesn't seem that long ago. That's our ever-shortening *experience* of our ever-shortened time.

In 1983, 34 years ago, EC marked the 500<sup>th</sup> year of Luther's *birth*. Now, we mark the 500<sup>th</sup> year of his *protest* against corruption in the medieval Church of Rome.

In 1983, I was 44. Thirty-four years *later*, it's hard to fathom that, 34 years *earlier*, I was 10 and in 5<sup>th</sup> grade! And it's no easier to fathom that 34 years *later*, I'm 78!

In an equivalent span of 34 years, at the crossing of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, that wee infant, Martin, had grown up to begin to change the course of history by calling for a return to the foundations of the faith of the *first* Christians.

Over EC's 4 decades we've honored many who learned from Luther's witness and passed along the Word of the Lord to still others. Doing so, *we, ourselves*, are called back to the foundations of the faith of the *first* Christians.

In that 500<sup>th</sup> year of *Luther's* birth, a baby was born to a devout Muslim couple. Three weeks ago he died of cancer. In his own 34 years, Nabeel Qureshi became a physician, a husband, a father and a dynamic disciple of Jesus in the worldwide ministry of Ravi Zacharias, launched 34 years ago by the financial backing of D. D. and Velma Davis. The Gospel that Luther recovered is still being preached.

An historian notes that folks in 40,000 denominations are "Christians, whose *religion* derives ultimately from Martin Luther's rebellion." (Alec Ryrie) *Actually*, it derives from *the Bible*, via Luther's rebellion. And Luther's legacy goes *far beyond religion*, as that historian indicates in his book's title: *Protestants: The Faith that Made the Modern World*.

Putting Columbus Day weekend in a Lutheran context, all four of the explorer's trans-Atlantic crossings were made in Luther's lifetime, but he nearly drowned on his first attempt when the ever-roving Islamist slave hunters seized his ship.

While on a visit with my brother and his family in 1983, I of course mentioned Martin Luther. And, immediately, my 9-year-old nephew, wanting to show that he was quite ready for this conversation, piped up: "Wasn't he black?"

Well, the root of my nephew's understandable confusion went back to half a century earlier, when the future civil rights leader was only 5-years-old.

In 1933, a young Atlanta pastor was on a pastors' tour of The Holy Land with ten other pastors. The tour continued into Germany where Hitler had just taken over. While visiting Germany's Luther sites, this pastor was so moved by what he learned about Martin Luther that he changed *his* name from *Mike* King to *Martin Luther* King. In changing his own name, his son's name got changed, too. Little *Mike* then became, *Martin Luther* King, Jr.

"Daddy" King, as he was affectionately known, was not the *only one* who *changed* his name to "Martin *Luther*". So did *Martin Ludher*! "Ludher" was the future Reformer's *family* name. But after the Gospel *freed* him at last from all the traps of ineffectual efforts to *earn* his heavenly Father's favor under all the medieval distortions of the Gospel, Martin changed *his surname* to match his newfound *freedom* in Christ. He took as his *new* name, "Luther", coining it from the Greek word for "freedom", *eleutheros*.

And, how *appropriate* – not only for Martin Luther, who now was “free at last” in God’s *free* grace in Christ, but for Martin Luther King, Jr., whose voice would ring out centuries later: “Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we’re free at last!”

In 1983, Luther’s 500<sup>th</sup> birth year, I visited those Luther sites that King saw fifty years before, in the 450<sup>th</sup> *birth* year. Incidentally, “Daddy” King passed away the day after Luther’s 501<sup>st</sup> *birthday*.

The *Soviet Socialist* intervention in East Germany in 1949 put most Luther sites behind the Iron Curtain. This puppet state, the so-called German *Democratic Republic* or the DDR, was as murderous and totalitarian as the Nazi’s takeover by Hitler’s so-called *National Socialist* German Workers. Hitler had boasted his “Third Reich” would last for a thousand years. But, within twelve years, this horror he’d spawned was finished, and Hitler was dead by suicide.

Both of these anti-Christian dictatorships utterly loathed Luther’s *faith in Christ*. But both hypocritically hyped their *self-serving Socialist* celebrations under the guise of Luther anniversaries. The Luther “veneration” was mere veneer, a summit of cynicism and the pits of opportunism. Both dictatorships *postured* Luther’s fame to push *racial idolatry*, the *German Volk*. Their awe was all about their *German bloodlines* and nothing at all about the *blood of the Lamb*.

Nazi propagandist, Goebbels, *postured* his twisted testimony in these words: “I take the Bible, and all evening long I read the simplest and greatest sermon that has ever been given to mankind: The Sermon on the Mount! ‘Blessed are they who *suffer persecution for the sake of justice*, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven!’” But, to Goebbels, these “*blessedly* persecuted” were *his persecuting, justice-smashing Nazis*. All that the Nazis ever did, *violated* the Sermon on the Mount. But, in goosestep with his era’s *liberal* Protestant “scientific progressivism”, derived from Schleiermacher, Ritschl and Harnack, Goebbels spun religious lingo for the Nazis. He *was*, after all, propagandist *von Excellenz*.

Praising *Hitler*, Nazis piously proclaimed: “Since Martin Luther closed his eyes, no such son of our people has appeared again. It has been decided that *we* shall be the first to witness his *reappearance!*”

No. Luther “closed *his eyes*” *in the peace of God’s grace in Christ* and he woke to his welcoming Savior. When Goebbels and Hitler were faced with *their* inevitable deaths at the demise of their Nazi atrocity, they were frightened cowards, and they tried to *save themselves* by suicide. They died in *disgrace*.

The Nazis had concocted a so-called “German Faith Movement”, reflecting the era’s *humanistic* Protestantism. It explicitly rejected *evangelical truth* about sin, guilt, and salvation: “*Our* forefathers knew nothing of these concepts and *they were more pious and reverent* than the Jews of the Old Testament”. Nazis crowed that they’d *finish* what Luther barely began in his protest: “We will not and cannot stand by Martin Luther’s *half* protest.”

But, by the time of the next big Luther anniversary, the Nazis had been *finished* for *forty* years. Tragically, their regime of only twelve years, terrorized, tortured and murdered millions upon millions of innocent men and women, young, elderly, children and babies – all for the sake of a self-servingly *pseudo religion* that, as in all *humanly devised religions*, has its own *self-righteously* biased frames of reference about “truth” and “heresy” – *or else!*

In 1945, Communists took over these Luther lands of *eastern* Germany. It was hyped as the Soviet’s *showcase* of “success”. But it, too, was a *socioeconomic* disaster and yet more oppression.

And, as with Nazis in 1933, 1983 gave Communists an excuse to hype *their* perversion of Luther to profit by pulling in plenty of much needed cash from Westerners on pilgrimage to Luther sites.

I was one of those tourists. As an American, and, as was also the case for Communist *elite*, i.e., Communist *Party officials*, we were accommodated in the DDR's few first-class facilities, all of which were, of course, *off-limits* to Communism's *commoners*.

I recall images of the socioeconomic mess of this police state. On a street in Luther's Wittenberg, I saw a brand new *wringer* washing machine like what we'd had in my childhood. It stood, all alone, in the window of a small and all but empty store for folks to drool over, if only they could afford to buy it, and, if only it worked after they bought it. And there, on the sidewalk, lurked the ever-present informants to the Stasi, the secret police. They spied on everyone, everywhere. No wonder the Berlin Wall was built, and, with orders to shoot-to-kill all, even mothers with their little children, as they tried to escape to *freedom* in *West* Germany.

The DDR Luther mementoes for sale to Western tourists were more *exquisite* than what was on offer in West Germany. They were made of fine Meissen china instead of cheap plastic and tin.

(Luther items are here from 1933 and 1983 celebrations along with medals from 1617's 100<sup>th</sup> through 2017's 500<sup>th</sup>, celebrations.)

After these many years of *required atheism* in the land of Luther, the London *Guardian* reports that, "a survey was unable to find a single person under the age of 28 who believed in God".

In 1983, I cited the University of Chicago's Martin Marty on the failures of both fundamentalist and liberal religionists. This senior Lutheran historian noted that, the former were "too pouncing and predatory ... grow[ing] by attracting the nostalgic, the frightened, the misled, the besieged" and the latter "still waver in conviction [and] are apathetic about belief, or are 'merely' tolerant as they settle for passionless decline." Marty's assessment is even truer today.

But whether *fundamentalists* try to refute *doubts with dogmas* or *progressives* try to refute *dogmas with doubts*, they're all still stuck in the *idolatries* of *their own self-righteous dogmas* and *self-righteous doubts*. So, at their very *foundations*, they *fail* to come to *realistic resolution* of their *spiritual* dogmas and doubts. That *resolution* is in the *regenerating* insights of a reasonably interpreted biblical faith that, as Luther discovered, *settles* the stress of *self-centered* dogmas and *self-centered* doubts, in the graciously revealed Truth Himself.

*This foundation* is in *Christian Scripture*, interpreted in light of the best understanding of the original contexts and in the ever-reforming awareness of the implications for application in ever-changing worlds of knowledge through God's gracious gifts to *all* by *common* grace.

Today, such a disciplined hermeneutic is perhaps nowhere more germane, theologically and pastorally, than in continuing Christian discernment around same-sex orientation and same-sex marriage. Indeed, these are among the relevant "Theses" for discussion, debate, and discernment at the front doors of *our churches* in 2017.

But *fundamentalisms* on the Right and on the Left wreak havoc. Along with everyone else, Christians once assumed that a *geocentric* universe was fact. Primitive peoples as well as advanced civilizations once believed it was fine to capture, buy, sell and own *other* people as slaves. Some still do. Christians used to preach that God condemned *interracial* marriage. They also swore on a stack of Bibles that God condemned education and voting rights for women. All their abused Bible "proof texts" are still in the Bible, but they're no longer abused to prove a "biblical" case for abusing others. Still, Christians abuse allegedly *antigay* Bible verses to abuse still others.

If we had lived in those *earlier* times, why do we assume we'd *not* have thought as *they* thought *there* and *then*? If we think we'd not have been *that selfish*, it's *our own selfish self-righteousness* that

wants to think so. So, “we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us”. (I John 1:8) Don’t *we, too*, try so desperately to “fit in” where we think we *need* to “belong” but fear we *don’t*? We *join up*, even *sign up*, to signal our virtue to get approval. Selfishly, we don’t “rock the boat” we’re in.

Yet, the “Golden Rule” has been in Scripture *all along*, pointing to what’s really right and wrong. Extra-biblical “golden rules” abound as well. But, evil lasts until The End.

All ancient wisdom literature, records of civilizations and folk tales of every people group across the ages and around the world, evidence a *persistent, existential human need to resolve* obviously anxious awareness that there’s *something terribly wrong with us* – greed, envy, lying, lust, theft, hatred, murder, betrayal, etc. Scientists suggest an innate “moral grammar” wired into our neural circuits, much as it’s said that humans have an innate neural wiring for language.

And even with all the secularist influence in America today, a recent representative survey finds that, *two-thirds* of Americans admit that they are *sinners* who *try* to be less so, or who *trust Jesus* to overcome their sin. Fifteen percent *claim* there’s *no such thing* as “sin” or, they sneer in defensiveness, that *they’re*, personally fine *being* “sinners”.

But *they’re not* personally fine when *others* “sin” against *them*. So, unintentionally, they reveal their *sense* of sin, a *sense* of injustice, and display it in self-centered outcries against the wrongs allegedly done to *them and theirs*.

And no matter how much these self-styled sophisticates *smirk* over the *terms*, “sin” and “sinner”, they’re not shy about *slamming as even far worse than* “sinners”, whomever *they* hate with their own self-righteous zeal, even anyone who *doesn’t agree* with them. Their *self-righteousness* is a flimsy cover for their *sin* that they *do see*, but *don’t admit*. Who needs a *self-righteous excuse* if he *really* thinks he’s fine “as is”? Besides, in circles where secularists circulate, to call a fellow secularist, a “sinner”, *falls flat*. So, where’d be the *payoff* in that?

But why assume that *nothing darker* lurks beneath the sophistry of secularists’ *presenting* complaints that camouflage a deeper, terribly troubling, sense of self for which *they* simply lack a vocabulary?

Said Paul: “God’s *invisible* eternal power and nature – has always been observable in His *visible* creation. So, nobody has any excuse.” (Romans 1:20)

Every totem, shrine and cultic rite and ritual, all the altars of child sacrifice, self-flagellation, selling and buying of papal indulgences in Luther’s day and fourteen centuries of terrorism unleashed in order to earn Allah’s rewards by suicidal slaughter of all “infidels” – all of this ugly, self-righteous panicking – *evidences* a fanatically frantic, yet utterly *useless*, indeed, *counterproductive* coping as the *guilt-ridden* try to put projected deities and even devils into *their* debt, to box *them* in, to pin *them* down so as to make *them owe* salvation to self-righteous sycophants in anxiety over what they’re quite aware is the *wrong within them* and what’s coming to *them* in *consequence*.

All of *these* efforts, as well as the *sophistry* and *cynicism* that scoffs at it all in hopeless denial and postmodern gibberish, are *symptoms* of what’s *horribly* wrong with us all and reveal that universal awareness of God of which Paul wrote. But locked up in our own self-reinforced cycles of self-righteous denial, we’re doomed and we know it.

But Luther learned of God’s amazing grace in Christ who *sacrificed himself for us!* “As the Father loves me, so I love you. ... No one can take my life from me. I sacrifice my life voluntarily.” (John 15:9; 10:18) What a dramatic reversal of false religions! The sacrificial submission is the Lord God’s!

To the ancients, it was thought that, knowing another’s *name* would give power over that person. We see it among demons opposed to Jesus. Even against their awareness of whom it was they were up against, they nonetheless tried to get the upper hand by boasting that *they knew* his *name*. Moses,

at the burning bush, tried to *know* God's *Name*. God's gracious response was not on Moses' terms, but was a true revelation that Moses needed: "*I AM* Who *I AM*" – the eternally sovereign and ever present Lord.

Near the end of the 46<sup>th</sup> Psalm, we're urged to pause and consider: "Be *still* and *know I AM*". That Psalm anchors Luther's greatest hymn, "A Mighty Fortress is Our God".

On an *interpersonal* level, in person or on social media, alleged "friends" try to impress, seduce or flatter for *returned praise*, to get a quick *fix of affirmation, submission, or else!* Why? They fear they *don't* measure up without *submission* from others. The less *polished* bullies run violent gangs, menacing and murdering others into giving *them* the submission *they* demand – *or else!* Why? They fear they *don't* measure up without *submission* from others. Legalist Christian Fundamentalists demand *submission* to *their* lists of do's and don'ts – *or else!* Why? Same reason. Legalist Progressives have *their* lists of do's and don'ts – *or else!* Why? Same reason. Muslims demand *submission* from all non-Muslims – *or else!* Why? They, too, *fear* that they *don't* measure up without *submission* from *all others*. *Islam* is Arabic for "submit". *Salaam* is Arabic for "peace". When all are in *submission* to Islam, it's rationalized there will be *peace*. Yet, ever since Mohammad's death, there's no *peace* even between the sects of Muslims. No! Any effort to get *others* to submit to *us* – individually or collectively – won't *do*. It *never* has. It *can't*!

Craving for power over others, even over gods and goddesses, has always been *with* us – and *within* us. Self-righteousness has always been *with* us – and *within* us. At BJU, in the 1950s, some self-righteous students disdained others as "pious prunes", and they didn't catch the irony. We seldom do. Today, it's called "virtue signaling", a term that is, in itself, but another self-righteous put down to bring others under *submission* to one's own sense of not measuring up.

Our *self-obsession* is evidence that, *indeed*, we *don't* measure up. *Obsessed* with fantasies for *our* welfare, we fall so far short of what we *owe* to others. Then, if we *sense* that *guilt*, we *can't stand it*. So we try to *suppress* it. But, we *can't*. Thank God! Let's get a clue!

Even so-called "*low self-esteem*" is *self-worship*. Do we lose more sleep over other's feared failures to measure up, or over *ours*?

Thankfully, there's evidence of *God's grace* in our daily *sensing* that we've not yet *matured*. And, if we sensed we *had arrived*, we'd be trapped in boredom with nowhere to go to *live out* our God-given call to manage what we've been given as stewards. It's a blessing to have something *meaningful* to do, not merely for *our own* pleasure, but for the good of *others* and to God's glory. These callings to ever challenging adventures provide for the meeting of God-given needs.

But, preoccupied with efforts to put others, even God, in *our* debt to try to believe we measure up to some sort of righteousness on our own!?! This was *not* our Creator's gracious calling for us in His wise and loving intent for our flourishing. It can lead only to continuing abuse of others and our failure, again and again, to meet *our* needs, which are to joy in *God's love for us, and for all* – even *through* us.

Even our *resistance* to admit *our guilt* can, under the *gracious indignation* of God, be a *gift*, for guilt weighs us down and wears us out and is *lovingly aimed* for real self-awareness and *repentance* meant to *turn us to the reality of relief in God* alone. Paul says God's *wrath* is constantly, *clearly revealed* against all our sinfulness. Our divinely purposed *apprehension* and *anxiety* is, indeed, God's warning (Rom 1:18) After all, worshipping *ourselves* or any "*gods*" but *the Living God* is moribund and finally, it's the bondage of death, apart from the Living God.

Yet, *fearing* we *don't* measure up and *frustrating* ourselves through *trying* to measure up, predictably, we default to what all fallen humanity does with anxiety and frustration – we get hostile and lash out, whether passively pouting or aggressing viciously, whether at each other or even at God.

And that solves nothing. We're still stuck in real and unrelieved *guilt*, self-righteously refusing to repent.

*Real guilt* can clue us *into* a humbling self-awareness that, as Luther learned, can drive us to the One who measures up *for us all* in deepest love and forgiveness that is *our need, our privilege*, as people created in God's image and Redeemed by God incarnate in Christ's substitutionary life and death for our sin. *In the Christ of the cross, who lived and died for us, and who was raised from death for us, we more than measure up.* We're *reborn* in *Christ's righteousness*, given to us in exchange for *our unrighteousness*.

In Luther's young adulthood, he was *very deeply distressed* in his distracting awareness that there was something terribly, terrifyingly, wrong with *him*. And perhaps, without all these attacks of *dread* – *Anfechtung*, was his term – there's *no earthly* reason he'd have so *relentlessly wrestled* through and emerged, by *God's grace alone*, into the assurance of peace that he found in *Christ, his Savior*, rather than the despair he'd feared to face in the one he'd trembled to meet, his presumed final *accuser*, “Christ, *the Judge*”.

In gratitude for the Good News of God's grace in Christ, Luther *knew that he just had to proclaim this Good News to all*, even if he'd have to die a martyr's death for doing so. What else *could* he do after finding such *freedom* from such *bondage*?

Still, he was well aware that, in challenging Rome's false teachers, his death was very likely the price he'd have to pay. And Rome *did* condemn him to *death*, but couldn't get its hands on him to kill him.

Of his previous dread, Luther wrote: “The misery of knowing we're sinners, awaiting God's judgment and always being exposed to death, which we cannot ward off nor escape ... My heart [was] sore troubled and sorrowful”. He said he hadn't known “which way to turn [fearing] God's wrath, punishment, and eternal damnation”. But now, his proclaiming what he'd come to know of *God's free grace* was not only his life's *work*, it was his *life*.

Luther's distracting *spiritual guilt* may seem melodramatic, even psychopathological, to *secular elites* who get themselves so distracted by self-conscious *social* insecurity. Rummaging inside *their selfish* sense of not measuring up they mistake *their thoughts* for the thoughts *inside* the brains of other nervous nannies stressing over *their selfish* worries about not measuring up. How stupidly narcissistic! None of these worriers *wisely* uses the brain God gave him or her.

Distracted by *social* dread that masks their *spiritual* dread, they are *self-medicating, self-meditating, overspending* and embarrassingly boasting to try to impress (which never *pleases* those they try to impress) while they *suppress* their God-given *gift of the deepest, most basic sense of not measuring up*. And, God, who would give them Christ's own *self-sacrificing* righteousness in exchange for their own *self-centered, self-righteousness*, is considered to be *irrelevant*.

But, *all efforts at trying to distract* oneself from one's *deep spiritual need*, whether expressed in ancient, medieval, modern or postmodern terms, are in denial of the *deep gift of a deep sense of falling far short* of who we were created to be and meant to be.

Retaliating self-righteousness takes offense at the slightest hint of criticism we irrationally *project* into *another's* words or behavior. This does, however, betray our being *on edge* over our *sense of guilt*. The unwanted feelings linger in suppression, depression and despair without the relief of an honest acknowledgment, without trusting, as Luther did, in Christ's gift of his righteousness in exchange for our unrighteousness.

Luther recalled that, “the most devastating doubt of all” was this: “Perhaps not even God is just.” Yet, *who but God* so graciously gave Luther his yearning for a deep, divine Heart of Justice so that he should, even in all of his distracting distress, *nevertheless expect God to be just?* Even before Luther

*experienced* more fully, the *merciful justice* of God in the grace and peace of Christ's atoning life and death, he couldn't and didn't escape that *nearest Presence of I AM*.

Luther confided: "I was myself more than once driven to the very abyss of despair so that I wished I had never been created. Love God? I hated him!" Yet, through all those dark days and even darker nights of unrelieved distress, Luther would not relent in his rigorous wrestling with God. He'd not let go of God, just as Jacob wouldn't let go as he wrestled with God throughout that hard night of *his* soul. Jacob vowed not to quit struggling with God until God blessed him. (Gen 32:25) Luther *would* not, *dared* not and *did* not stop his own struggling with God before he knew the *liberty* of God's love.

For Jacob and Luther, that *struggling* was a *strenuous expression of need*, of *faith* and of *self-doubt*, not an expression of *self-righteous self-sufficiency*. As Luther said at the end, "We're all beggars!"

In response to Jacob's perseverance and Luther's, the Lord *blessed them* so that *their deepest identity* was changed to lead generations to *blessings*. All Christians need to revise *our deepest identity*, from a *self-centered idolatry of identity* in gender, race, sexual orientation or politics, to reflect our *identity in Christ*. Said Paul: "*In Christ* there's neither *Jew* nor *Greek*, *slave* nor *free*, there's no *male and female*." (Gal 3:28) Paul testified that, "For me, to *live* is *Christ*; to *die* is *gain*." (Phil 1:21) That's what Jesus meant when he told his disciples that *he* must be killed and raised to life: "And if anyone *would follow me*, he must *deny himself*, *take up his cross*, daily, and *follow me*." (Luke 9:23)

Anyone sentenced to crucifixion had to *carry his own cross beam* to his execution. It was a *one-way* trip. But, for Christians, no matter how terrible *the trek*, our *ultimate* destination is *not* a cross, but an empty tomb and beyond, *fullness of life forever with Christ*.

Jesus warned: "If this world hates you, remember, it hated me first. It would love you as one of its own, if you *belonged* to it. But *your identity* is no longer in *this* world. I chose you to *come out of this* world. So, it hates you. ... Indeed, the time is coming when your killers will think they're doing it as a service to God." (John 15:18f; 16:2) And that's been the case for 2,000 years.

In Heidelberg in 1518, Luther argued that, "The man who imagines he will come to *grace* by doing whatever *he* is able to *do* is *adding sin to sin*. So, he becomes doubly guilty. Nor is speaking in this way any cause for despair; rather, it moves men to humble themselves and seek the *grace of Christ*. It is certain that a man must completely despair of *himself* in order to receive the *grace of Christ*."

In his *Bondage of the Will* in 1525, Luther wrote: "Grace is freely given to the most undeserving and unworthy and is not obtained by efforts, endeavors, or works, small or great, not even by the efforts of the best and most honorable who have sought and followed righteousness with burning zeal." He knew that from experience.

Luther had been born on November 10, 1483, in Saxony, a thousand year-old German region of the Holy Roman Empire. His parents were peasants, although his father, leaseholder of a copper mine, was able to pay for a good education for his son.

In 1501, at 19, he went off to the University at Erfurt. College life was recalled as a beerhouse and a whorehouse. Still, he was nicknamed "the professor" and earned two degrees at Erfurt.

His father then pushed him into the study of law so as to help in the mining business. Martin reluctantly complied. But his spiritual dread was distracting him in this era of the menacing Black Death.

One fateful night, while returning to law school after visiting his parents, he was suddenly caught in a violent thunderstorm. Bolts of lightning crashed around him and he feared death right then and there. Thrown off of his terrified horse, he cried out to St. Anne, patron saint of miners, promising that, if his life were spared, he'd become a monk. So in 1507, he made his monastic vows and was ordained at 24. But his sense of guilt and distress did not abate.

The next year, he was transferred to the Wittenberg cloisters and he studied at the new university there. In 1510, he was sent on a pilgrimage to Rome to try to resolve continuing dread and doubts.

At Rome, Pope Julius II ruled contemptuously, and he was repeatedly accused of lascivious sodomy and carnal luxuries for which he'd drained the building fund for St. Peter's Cathedral. Consequently, construction was suspended. Schemes were concocted to replace the missing funds. A perverted plan for papal indulgences was then set up to get the guilt-ridden peasants to buy their forgiveness from a treasury of "surplus good deeds" of the saints. The indulgences would release souls from Purgatory.

As Luther wandered around the Vatican and throughout the city, during his many months in Rome, he was shocked and disgusted at all the flagrant fraud he witnessed – financial, sexual, religious, whatever.

In 1511, trudging back across the Alps to Wittenberg, he grieved over all that he'd seen of Rome's corruption and hypocrisy.

In 1512, finishing his doctorate, he joined the Wittenberg faculty. In 1513 he taught on the Psalms, in 1515, on Paul's Romans letter, and in 1516, on Paul's Galatians letter. In these *evangelical* letters he saw the very opposite of what the medieval church had become.

In 1516, he wrote to a fellow friar who'd all but given up his own faith: "O, my dear brother, learn to know Christ, Christ crucified. Learn to sing to Him a *new* song, to despair of *yourself*, and to say to Him, Lord Jesus, *You are my righteousness, and I am Your sin: You have taken what is mine and have given me what is Yours.*" He told his friend: "You'll find no peace except in Him, despairing of *yourself* and *your own* works, and learning with what love He opens His arms to you, taking *on Him* all *your faults* and giving to *you* all *his righteousness.*"

In 1517, as Luther began lectures on Hebrews, he knew he could *not* go on without calling wide attention to what he was learning from Scripture about the *overflowing grace* of God.

So, on October 31, 1517, All Saints Eve, he posted a notice for honest disputation on 95 theses he wanted to debate among his theological fellows. That public announcement, at the door of the Wittenberg's Castle Church, marked the *formal* beginning of what is now known as the Protestant Reformation.

Matters for disputation included the hawking of the useless papal indulgences, among which were veneration of a vial of Mary's milk, baby teeth of Jesus, and some remains of the Holy Innocents massacred by Herod the Great. Said Luther: "The revenues of all Christendom are being sucked into this insatiable basilica. First of all, we should rear *living* temples, not buildings, and only *last of all* St. Peter's. Why doesn't the pope build St. Peter's basilica with his own money? He's richer than Croesus." And, indeed, the pope in 1517, Leo X, was from the very wealthy Medici banking family.

Luther argued that no pope had any authority over any so-called Purgatory: "If the pope does have power to release *anyone* from Purgatory, why in the name of love does he not *abolish* Purgatory by freeing *everyone*?" Besides, he said: "All who are contrite do have plenary remission of guilt and penalty without indulgences."

He argued: "Indulgences are positively harmful because they *impede* salvation by diverting charity and inducing a *false* sense of security. ... Christians should be taught that the one who gives to the poor is better than the one who receives such a pardon. He who spends money on indulgences rather than relieving the needs of the poor gets not a pope's indulgence but God's indignation."



From his *own* experience, he testified: “God works by contraries, so that, one feels he’s to be *lost* in the very moment when he’s on the point of being *saved*. . . . We must first cry out that there is no health in *us*. . . . *In this distress, salvation begins*. When we believe we’re to be utterly lost, light breaks in. Peace comes in the word of Christ through faith.”

In 1518, Luther was summoned to Rome to answer accusations of heresy at a show trial that would have resulted in his being burned alive. But Frederick the Wise, Elector of Saxony and the Wittenberg’s University founder, was Luther’s protector and he refused to comply with Rome’s demands for Luther’s extradition. So, the papal legate of Germany was sent to Augsburg, but *not* to debate, only to *demand* that Luther recant. He refused to recant.

In 1520, Leo X issued his papal bull declaring Luther a heretic, dubbing him “a wild boar” worthy of death and all the hellfire of excommunication. At that, Luther’s closest friend, the young scholar, Phillip Melancthon, showing a rare feisty side over his usually quiet, scholarly manner, called for a bonfire at the town dump and Luther tossed that damned papal bull into the flames.

In 1521, at Worms, Luther *was* excommunicated, but Frederick faked a kidnapping and hid him at his Wartburg Castle where, in disguise, he translated the *New Testament* into German. Historian Philip Schaff says *this* was “*the most important work*” of his life. In 1522, he returned to Wittenberg where he, Melancthon and cohorts, translated the *Old Testament*. It was published in 1534.

Throughout his evangelical preaching, Luther *grieved* over the *persistent rejection* of the Gospel by Rome, by hoards of Muslims plundering Europe and by the Jews who still rejected the Messiah. Against all of that opposition, he wrote angry rebuke, later misread as racism and anti-Semitism. But, it came from his commitment to the Gospel and because, as a Luther scholar explains, “he took the Old Testament and its patriarchs and prophets so very seriously.” (George Forell)

Unlike Islam, Calvin, Zwingli and the later Puritans, he rejected all *religious totalitarianism* for he held to a ‘two kingdoms’ view – secular rule for all and allegiance to Christ’s reign by Christians.

Luther was a lover of song. The most famous of all his hymns is, “*Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott*”, “A Mighty Fortress is Our God”. He wrote the words and the music, alluding to both Old and New Testament texts. Our only hope is in Christ, “Lord *Sabaoth*”, Lord of Hosts, who is, “from age to age the same. And *He* must win the battle. . . . Though *this* world, with devils filled, should threaten to undo us, we *will not* fear for God has willed *His* truth to *triumph* through us. The prince of darkness grim, we tremble not for him. His rage we can endure, for look, his doom is sure. One little word shall fell him.” *What* word? The Word of the Lord, *written*, the Word of the Lord, *made flesh*, *eternal* Word above *all* words, the Word that was *with God in the beginning*, the Word that, indeed, *was God*, the *Name* above *all* names, and yet, as Paul said: It will be “with but a *breath* from the *mouth of Christ*” that Satan will be utterly destroyed at last. (II Thes. 2:8)

In 1525, Luther had married a former nun whom he affectionately called, “My lord, Katie” but Rome called it “whoredom”. Katie ran their household, slaughtered their livestock, cooked and tended their gardens and hosted their student tenants. It was a loving and joyous family of six children whose parents were great practical jokers. But, in that era when children often didn’t survive childhood, one of their infants did die and their dear Magdalena – affectionately known as, “Lenchen” – died at 13.

In the frigid winter of 1546, while on business in the village of his birth, Luther's heart gave out and he died on February 18<sup>th</sup>. He had reminded his friends, "We're all beggars."

The words reflect three of Luther's Reformation themes: *Scripture*, *Grace* and *Faith*.

In our next three sessions, we'll look into these. In the morning, *Sola Scriptura* (By Scripture Alone), in the afternoon, *Sola Gratia* (By Grace Alone) and on Sunday morning, *Sola Fide* (By Faith Alone).

And now let's take a look into our Luther museum.