

Grace and Peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

In 1517 Martin Luther nailed a list of 95 items to be debated to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg. What followed that act was a sweeping reformation of the Church and the western world. For centuries now Protestants have celebrated the changes the reformation brought about, not just in the Church but in society and culture. Many credit Martin Luther with stumbling into a revolution that brought about profound changes in the western world: the enlightenment; the foundation of individual potential with the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, the era of human rights with belief that each human being is precious in God's eyes.

What interests me on this 501st year of the Reformation is not so much what followed Luther's discovery of justification by grace through faith but what precipitated the revolution that followed. As any pastor or any leader knows, change does not happen easily. In fact, it generally causes great upheaval when it comes because people, the world, and those in power benefit from stability. ***Yet, sometimes, change must occur, or else decay, decline, deterioration, or even death becomes inevitable.***

Martin Luther did not cause the all encompassing reformation that occurred in the 16th century. He merely ***kindled the spark*** that ignited change the Church, society, and the world desperately needed. ***Put simply, that state of the Church, society, the world – and not coincidentally Martin Luther's life – was in crisis. The Church, the Holy Roman Empire, and the feudal system – which governed the lives of everyone from kings to serfs – no longer functioned to address the needs***

of a dramatically changing world.

Luther himself faced a crisis of meaning and identity. The worldview taught to him by the world and the Church failed to provide answers, purpose or meaning in light of the corruption he saw both within and outside of himself. *The world simply didn't make sense anymore.* Try as he might – and he tried fervently, pray as he might – and he prayed fervently, confess as he might – and he confessed fervently, Luther found no peace.

Everything lined up – the state of the world, the Church's view of God and Luther's certainty that he was doomed before a judging, righteous God – so that *when Luther happened upon his reformation insight* – “*the righteous shall live by faith*” – *everything began to make sense.*

Luther discovered that neither he nor anyone else could address the rotting state of affairs that he knew as himself and the world. Luther came to understand himself as *the source of the problem, not the solution.* Here Jesus' words reached Luther, “*You will know the truth, and the truth shall set you free.*” He understood that he was a slave to sin – to serving his own wants and needs, and elects to take Christ a new master to be enslaved to for the sake of the world.

Powerless to remedy the tangled, rotten mess that he and the rest of humanity had made life and the world into, *Luther realized that the only hope was to surrender his own solutions and trust God's promises made known in Jesus.* It led young *Luther to understand that he was a slave to himself, his will, his own arrogance.* **The solution,** he would discover: *serve God not himself, trust God's will and promises and not his own,* and

humbly submit himself to a purpose and reason greater than his own.

Luther grasps that the only solution to this insane life and world: turn his life and the world over to God, the serve God by caring for all his neighbors and the greater good.

Five hundred and one years after Luther's fateful act of defiance, we find ourselves once again in a time of crisis dramatic change. ***The Church, our political systems, the world economy, the planet face a daunting future. Systems and institutions that have functioned for centuries to address the challenges of life are no longer capable of addressing needs of a dramatically changing world.***

Sisters and brothers, we don't have to look far to see that things are decaying all around us: this weekend, *yet another mass shooting*; unprecedented hurricane damage yet again this year; *politicians entrenching themselves against a wave of change and an electorate grasping at anything in our desperation*; an increasing gap of wealth between the rich and everybody else; *rising seas level*; terrorism reaching into every corner of the world; *schools barricaded to protect our children*; a melting polar ice cap; *7 million people on our small planet*; ever more distressed species of animals and habitat; *an ever-growing sense of individual isolation*; and hopelessness among the young people in our world.

The world is in crisis, and no solutions seem to be on the horizon. The world needs reformation. ***What can we – the Church, the people of God – offer a world yet again on the brink?***

May I suggest we follow Luther's lead and dwell on the verse that gave him ***reformation insight*** – "*the righteous shall live by faith.*"

Things are the same. Luther discovered that neither he nor anyone else could address the rotting state of affairs that he knew as himself and the world, and we feel that powerless to correct a world gone wrong.

Perhaps if we join Martin Luther understanding ourselves as ***the source of the problems, rather than the solution***, we might find a new path forward. Powerless to remedy the tangled, rotten mess that he and the rest of humanity had made life and the world into, ***we need to surrender the ourselves and world into God's care. When we begin to fathom that we are slaves to our own desires, our will, and our own arrogance, we may have a reformation insight of our own . When we choose serve God not ourselves and our every desire, trust God's will and promises and not our own, and humbly submit ourselves to a purpose and reason greater than our own.***

Luther grasped that the only solution to this insane life and world was to turn his life and the world over to God, the serve God by caring for all his neighbors and the greater good. If we do the same, caring for our neighbor, diligently policing our own habits to save the planet from global warming, counteracting the ever dissolving human community by thinking of and serving those other than ourselves we will, like Luther, be prophets in our own time. And just possibly participate in a reformation that could literally save the world.

Listen to Jesus' words, "*Everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin.*" Can you admit that you are enslaved to your own desires. If you can accept this as Luther does, "*You will know the truth, and the truth can set you free.*" We can take Christ a new master and serve Christ. And enslaved to for the sake of the world to God, with God's help we can change the world. **AMEN !!!**