

## **Dedication of Reformation Trees - September 17, 2017**

On October 31 of this year we will mark the 500th Anniversary of the start of the Reformation. On that day, October 31, 1517, Dr. Martin Luther, professor of Biblical studies at the University of Wittenberg, and an Augustinian Friar who by then had considerable responsibilities in the administration of that order in his region, challenged the practices of the church of the day in regards to selling the forgiveness of sins by posting his 95 Theses. These 95 points for discussion became the words that sparked the Reformation. While we often think of the Reformation as primarily religious in nature, it was in fact an entire social and cultural revolution in western Europe. The old Medieval compact with the church at the centre of every aspect of life across the continent was pushed aside to make way for the modern nation state, notions of personal conscience and personal freedom.

Sadly, it also unleashed the darker side of human nature as the different factions took up arms against each other. But then again, it wasn't as though the princes and kings of Europe weren't already constantly at war with each other. One has only to think of the Hundred Years' War between France and England, or the Wars of the Roses in England itself, to see that the Reformation did not so much cause war, as channel those wars in new ways.

But we are not here today to dwell on the details and finer points of historical analysis, but rather to mark this significant anniversary of our own theological tradition, of our own church tradition. Martin Luther did not set out to divide the church, but to reform it. He saw that many of the practices of the day were in direct opposition to the source of all Christian teaching, namely the Bible. For him, the most important point was that, as it says in Romans:

Since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are now justified by God's grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. (Romans 3:25a)

Or as we often summarize it: "We are saved by God's grace through our faith in Jesus Christ."

Once you realize that, then the church's agenda is no longer about making you do stuff to earn God's forgiveness, but it is rather about a community of people gathering together around the Good News of God's love to encourage each other, to remind each other of that love, and to practice being together in that love.

It is appropriate then that these trees should each be given in honour or memory, not only of the Reformation itself, but of people who were important in the lives of those who gave the trees. This is an expression of God's love flowing through us to others. We pray that these trees will grow and flourish here, and that they will always call us back to our roots, as Lutherans, and as children of God. Amen.

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