



Reformation History #11: *Luther's Seal* by Pastor Glenn Huebel

The conclusion a year-long series on Reformation history and theology, from November 2016—October 2017, in commemoration of the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation.

During this past year, I have detailed certain aspects of the history of the Lutheran Reformation through a series of newsletter articles. We come now to the big anniversary itself, October 31, 2017, 500 years after the nailing of the 95 theses. I want to turn from the objective history and theology to the more subjective topic of faith. Luther was awakened by the Biblical phrase, "the just shall live by faith." This word, by the power of the Holy Spirit, shined in his darkened heart and created faith. He testifies that it was a renewing experience, a spiritual resurrection. Everything changed for him at that moment.

Faith is more powerful than we can imagine (see Hebrews 11). What does faith look like? It is pictured for us in the symbol we call "Luther's seal." The seal has become the primary symbol of the Lutheran Church throughout the world. We see it every Sunday in our stained glass window. Luther designed the seal at the behest of John Frederick of Saxony. It first appeared on his printed writings in black and white, with his initials. (A 1520 version is at the end of this article.) After a while, printers began to include colored illustrations in Luther's publications, and the seal was hand-painted on each copy. Luther gave his own

interpretation of the seal in a letter to Lazarus Spengler in July, 1530 (see the text on the back cover). This reformation series closes with a contemplation of the faith as it is pictured in this famous seal. This is the faith that makes a true Lutheran, for in paraphrase of St. Paul, "no one is a Lutheran who is merely one outwardly, but a Lutheran is one inwardly." Faith is pictured in five important symbols contained in the seal:

THE BLACK CROSS: We begin with the focal point. The focal point of the seal is the object of our faith, the black cross in the middle of the heart. Luther could have placed a picture of the face of Jesus, I suppose, but that would not have been sufficient, for though Christ is the center of our faith, we must understand this to mean CHRIST CRUCIFIED. So many interpret "Jesus" in a different way and lead people away from the true object of faith even while using "Jesus language." It is not "Jesus the example," or "Jesus the miracle worker," or "Jesus the wise man," or "Jesus the healer" that faith clings to, but Jesus the SAVIOR OF THE WORLD. His salvation was won in no other way than through the cross by which He made the all-sufficient atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world. He came into the world for this end, to bear the cross that He might pay our debt of sin, set the captives free, and conquer death forever (Heb 2:14). Without the cross, there is no salvation. Those who exalt a Jesus apart from the cross, worship a counterfeit Jesus. He came from heaven to die for the sins of the world. Thus St. Paul writes, "I am determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified." A faith that clings to any other object than the crucified Christ, is vain.

THE RED HEART: The gift of eternal life through Christ is received and embraced only by the heart. "With the heart man believes into righteousness" (Rom 10:10). Most religion in the world, including much of what

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*That you may believe that Jesus is the Christ,
the Son of God, and that by believing
you may have life in His name. —John 20:31*

passes as Christianity, is only outward display of one kind or another. Like Isaiah said of the Jews in his day, "they draw near to me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me." The Prophet Joel and John the Baptist confronted and condemned "repentance" of form but not of the heart. Joel tells the religious leaders to "rend your hearts, not your garments" (Joel 2:13). John the Baptist rebukes the proud Pharisees and calls them to "bring forth fruit meet for repentance" (Matt 3:8). Jesus condemns the Pharisees and religious leaders as those who are "clean on the outside but full of dead men's bones within" (Matt 23:27). Man judges the outward appearance, but God sees the heart. Faith is trust of the heart in the gospel of the crucified Christ. Faith BELIEVES that Christ lived my life and died my death. Faith trusts that His merits alone justify. Though Lutherans appreciate traditions and can debate theology all day, it is not empty words, faithless confession, and worship forms that define a Lutheran. Without faith it is impossible (even for a traditional Lutheran) to please God (Heb 11:6).

THE WHITE ROSE: Faith is a living, active, powerful thing. It does not leave the heart of the sinner unchanged, nor does it leave him in despair and darkness. Faith translates the soul from death to life, from slavery to freedom, from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light. Faith produces joy, comfort, and peace, but not the joy, comfort, and peace of this world. The joy of the Lord is described by the prophet, Habakkuk: *"though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vine, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will take joy in the God of my salvation."* Likewise the

peace of the Lord *"passes all understanding"* (Phil 4:7). Christians are not dreary people who believe that austerity and somberness are godly virtues. We are not those who continuously wallow in guilt thinking that this somehow pleases God. We believe and rejoice in God's promises. We believe the absolution. We believe that we are God's beloved children, and that nothing in heaven above or hell below can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Even though we feel pain and sorrow in this cursed world, we do not sorrow as the world does. Our sorrows are always tempered with the abiding joy of faith in Christ in whom we have the victory.

THE BLUE BACKGROUND: Faith produces hope. Again, it is not the hope that the world understands, for the world does not see hope as anything more than the desire for a good outcome. We "hope" that it doesn't rain on our picnic or that our team will win the game next week. Even if we have reasonably strong confidence that our hope will be fulfilled, it is nothing close to absolute certainty. The hope of faith is absolute certainty about the future. This is not certainty based upon our desires, but upon the clear promises of God. God's Word tells us that we are co-heirs with Christ and that we shall reign with Him in the Kingdom of glory to come. God's Word assures us that we have an inheritance kept for us in heaven, where moth does not corrupt and thieves cannot steal. This is not the future that MIGHT BE "if" we do something. This is the inheritance that was purchased and paid in full by our Savior, Jesus Christ. God, who cannot lie, promised it to us, and His promise will not fail. Christians are the most optimistic people in the world. We KNOW where history ends, and we look forward with eager anticipation to the celebration.

THE GOLD CIRCLE: The circle has long been a symbol of eternity. Our inheritance in Christ is eternal. It is impossible for us to fully grasp the concept of eternity because we are bound, in this world, to the dimension of time. The best we can do to understand eternity is to visualize time that extends forever. We have no way to comprehend a timeless environment. Furthermore, time in this world always leads to change and decay. Time leads inevitably to "aging." For wine that may be a good thing, but for humans, not so much, because aging leads inevitably to death. Time leads to obsolescence. Time leads to boredom (today, more than ever!). Eternal glory does not bring any of those things with it. The blessed rest we receive in heaven is not a "break" from labor, but the everlasting end of labor. The joy of heaven will never diminish. Our glorified bodies will never age or need repair. Sorrow will be no more. Death will be no more. War will be no more. Everything that caused sorrow, affliction, pain, and sin in this world will be cast into the abyss and locked away forever. Our salvation is eternal.

Blessed is the soul that walks in this faith and not by sight. Thanks be to God for our rich heritage as Lutherans.



Remember to help our school by liking, sharing, following, re-tweeting, etc.! @MLCATexas

Thoughts on Church Membership: Grief by Pastor Tom Chryst

Our Young Adults Group has begun a study of a little book called, *Connected to Christ: Why Membership Matters*. It's especially helpful, I find, for a group of people who, because of their age and place in life, may soon find themselves "church shopping". Recent college grads, young couples looking toward marriage and family, people early in their careers, and so forth, are often more likely to be moving around and in the position of trying to find a new church home.

We're glad to have all these people here in our fellowship of faith at Messiah. And while we want them prepared should they ever have cause to move away and find a new congregation, we also want our own members to be strengthened in their commitments and understanding of just why it is that we join and belong to a local congregation anyway. And so that goes for the "new members" and the "not-so-new members alike".



One of the first points the author makes is that a congregation needs many people of varying gifts to do its work. This may seem like a no-brainer, but we can sometimes forget that each of us has a unique set of gifts, talents, and even interests to offer the local congregation. One way of looking at this might be to say, "gee, I don't fit in" or "I'm an outsider – different than the rest". But a more helpful way is to say, "look at what I can offer that maybe no one else can!" As St. Paul shows with his analogies of the church as a body with many members, each having a different function – so does each local congregation (as also the church at large) need and value the varying gifts and characteristics of her members.

The next chapter, which we're currently "in the thick of", has to do

with the main purpose of church. If the church is simply a social club or a place to be entertained, or even a place to come and exercise your faith – then there are not many compelling reasons to attend, let alone join a local congregation. But if we understand rightly – that the church is a place, a real life place and space in time, in which God gives you his gifts of Word and Sacrament – then that changes the whole picture. Frankly, this is why Lutheran theology sees the local gathering of Christians as essential – because of the means of grace. Here, in this place (or wherever Christians gather), Christ makes himself known, and even bodily present in the Sacrament – to bring us his good gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation.

So much of what we do and say revolves around this chief, weekly gathering of the congregation. It's our main purpose as a congregation – to receive the gifts of God in Christ Jesus.

This will lead us into a better appreciation of "Why Membership Matters". I'll give you a further update next month as our study unfolds on just where the study takes us.

In other news, and on a personal note, I want to thank you all who have poured out your prayers and expressions of sympathy at the death of Brenda's father, Dan. It seems like this past month at Messiah we've had to face death on a number of fronts, with also a couple of younger people being called to their eternal rest. One observation I've made through it all is that "Grief is exhausting". Certainly our Lord Jesus knew this as well, as he carried our sorrows and bore our griefs, even to the cross. But thanks be to God for the victory over death and grave that is ours in Jesus Christ!

In a way, our membership here at a Christian congregation is all about preparing for death. As we receive the gifts of God in the Word and Sacraments – our sins are forgiven, our faith is strengthened, and we are prepared for that day when our Lord



calls us home to receive the crown of righteousness. We are also prepared for that day when a loved one is called home and we are left behind to mourn. Our faith is important in the normal moments, but it is especially a source of strength in the times of suffering. The promises of God, precious and comforting, carry us through the troubled waters and sustain us in the raging flood.

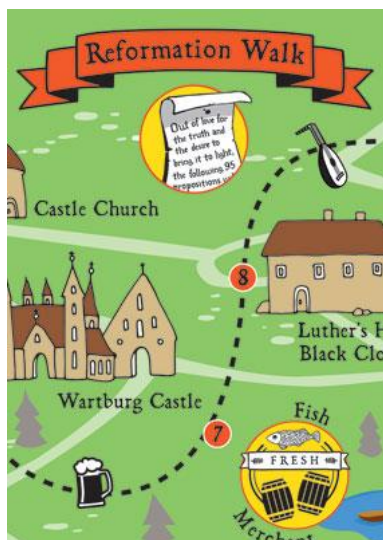
I wonder about all the situations St. Paul had in mind – perhaps not too far from what all of us face - when he wrote these precious words from Romans 8:31-39:

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written,

*"For your sake we are being killed all the day long;
we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered."*

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Reformation Celebration at Messiah on October 28



Walk where Luther walked. You may not live in sixteenth-century Germany, but on October 28, starting at 4:00pm, you can walk in the footsteps of Martin Luther at **Reformation Walk**. This fun and informative tour through ten sites will include a unique exhibit of original writings dating back to 1524. Your whole family will enjoy the sights, sounds, and tastes of the Reformation. You might even learn why pretzels are shaped the way they are.

Reformation Walk tours will start from an old fashioned Oktoberfest with plenty of food, beverages, music and games. We will have a very special brew made just for the occasion. Also, not to be

missed, our very own Messiah Lutheran Classical Academy students are sure to provide stirring performances of song and dance.

For your part, commit to attending with your family and bringing at least one non-member guest with you. Talk up the event on social media. Donations, earmarked "Reformation500", to cover expenses may be made ahead of time by dropping a check in the offering plate or by signing into www.messiahkeller.org, clicking on the Online Giving button and using the "other" option. Give generously as all unused funds will go to the MLCA tuition assistance fund.

Youth Group News

Wednesday Night Youth Night: Every Wednesday, 6:30-8pm, Grades 6+



Meet Michelle Pickett. She has been co-leading the Wednesday Night Youth Night with Pamela Buhler. Her first topic series is

on LCMS Pastor Jonathan Fisk's book *BROKEN*:

Broken stands on the foundation of Scripture and exposes the ways that the devil twists hearts, minds, and hands away from the true and real theology of the Lord. The lessons aren't easy to learn, but they are vital to the survival of the Church."
—The Editor

The Lord comes to us through the Sacraments and the Word. Although prayer is important, we should seek Spiritual advice in God's Word and

lead people to Scripture when they are struggling. Relying on yourself or your feelings for answers will give you false hope and lead you away from Jesus. Stay in the Word!

In September we led the following topics:

- Wednesday, Sept 13, Fisk Topic: *Stay in the Word* with Mrs. Pickett
- Wednesday, Sept 20, Fisk Topic: *Trust God, Not Idols Part 1* with Mrs. Pickett
- Wednesday, Sept 27, Bible Study: *Parable of the Sower* with Mrs. Buhler

In October, we will be leading the following topics:

- Wednesday, Oct 4, Fisk Topic: *Trust God, Not Idols Part 2* with Mrs. Pickett
- Wednesday, Oct 11, *Following the Commandments Part 1* with Mrs. Pickett
- Wednesday, Oct 18, *Following the Commandments Part 2* with Mrs. Pickett

- Wednesday, Oct 25, Bible Study: *Parable of the Weeds* with Mrs. Buhler

Scrapbooking our W.A.Y. to Organization...

Calling all youth and parents who would like to help organize our W.A.Y. pictures. We have many years' worth of pictures on poster boards we'd like to get into albums. We are over half way done, but could use some more help. Contact Stacy or Pamela. A lot of hands make the work easy and enjoyable!

English County Dance Lessons (ages 10—adult)

These activities take place in the Fellowship Hall. Our next few events will be held on:

- October 13th- Lesson \$5
- October 27th- Reformation Costume Ball \$20
- November 10th- Lesson \$5
- December 8th- Lesson \$5

Care Board: Caring for our church family... by Pamela Buhler



Caring for our Military & College Students:

We have 3 of our 20 college students Cared For! If you would like to send a care package to let our youth know we care please contact

Pamela Buhler or see our display board in the Fellowship Hall. If you would like to contribute goodies for the packages, please drop them off in the basket in the Fellowship Hall.



REFORMATION 2017 It's *Still* All About **Jesus**

(The following is from the Synod's lutheranreformation.org website.)

The Reformation was not about anything new, but about returning to the unchanged and unchanging truth. So it is still today. The celebration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation is not a time for novelty. It is a time to return: to the truth, to the basics, to the foundation.

Do you remember the Small Catechism? Many of us were made to memorize the catechism (or at least part of it) during our Confirmation classes. Some of us might have even suffered through a public examination over its contents.

How much do you remember? Say it with me: "I believe that I cannot by

my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him..." Can you finish? Do you remember where that is found? (It's in Luther's explanation of the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed.)

It's time to return. Luther wrote the Small Catechism for the instruction of laypeople. Luther intended the Small Catechism to be used at church and in the home to instruct children in the faith and to reinforce the faith in the hearts and minds of adults.

There is no better time than in this year of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation to review the catechism.

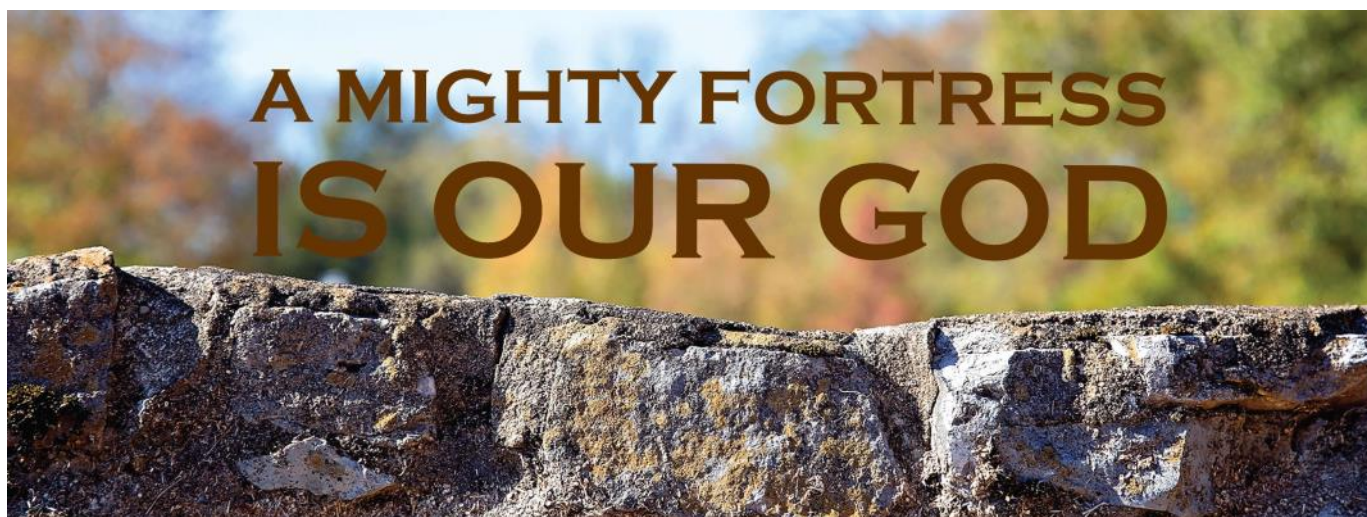
Read it for yourself. Refresh the theology in your mind. Pray the

catechism daily. Memorize it.

But even more, teach it. If you are a parent, teach it to your children. As you have opportunity, share it with your friends and peers.

The catechism teaches the fundamentals of the Christian faith: the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer, the Apostles' Creed, the Sacrament of Baptism, the Sacrament of the Altar and the Office of the Keys and Confession. This small book is well worth your time and study.

May this celebration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation be a time when we return to the Word and Sacraments, when we turn to Christ and His love. It's *still* all about Jesus.



FACES OF THE REFORMATION

MARTIN LUTHER (LAST DAYS)

Born: Nov. 10, 1483 | Eisleben, Germany
Died: Feb. 18, 1546 | Eisleben, Germany



REFORMATION
2017 It's Still All About
Jesus

LutheranReformation.org

An Outlaw and International Hero Who Commended Himself and the Church of the Reformation to Christ's Mercy

IN LATER LIFE, MARTIN LUTHER HAD BECOME INTERNATIONALLY KNOWN. Despite his return to Wittenberg from hiding at the Wartburg, Luther remained an outlaw due to his condemnation at Worms. However, Saxony was isolated enough that he was safe from the emperor so long as he remained there. Thus, his role became one of providing guidance to others.

Luther adopted a new role as leader of a new church body. He discovered that many of the laity were ignorant of his reforms. After translating the Bible into German, he wanted the laity to be able to engage with it. Therefore, he wrote his Small and Large Catechisms in order to provide good theology that the laity could understand, an entry point into the Scriptures, and right order and behavior.

In this period, Luther also had to address theological problems. In addition to his continued challenges with Rome's response to the Reformation, he also faced other reformers who transformed his ideas to their own ends.

First, Luther clarified the relationship of the church and the state. Due to the Peasants' Revolt, he was faced with a theological question of how "social" his Gospel needed to be. Luther responded by developing his two kingdoms theology. This theology holds that we must distinguish clearly between God's Kingdom of Power and His Kingdom of Grace. Christians should act in society according to their consciences — which are informed by their faith — but Luther did not believe that the church should dictate government policy.

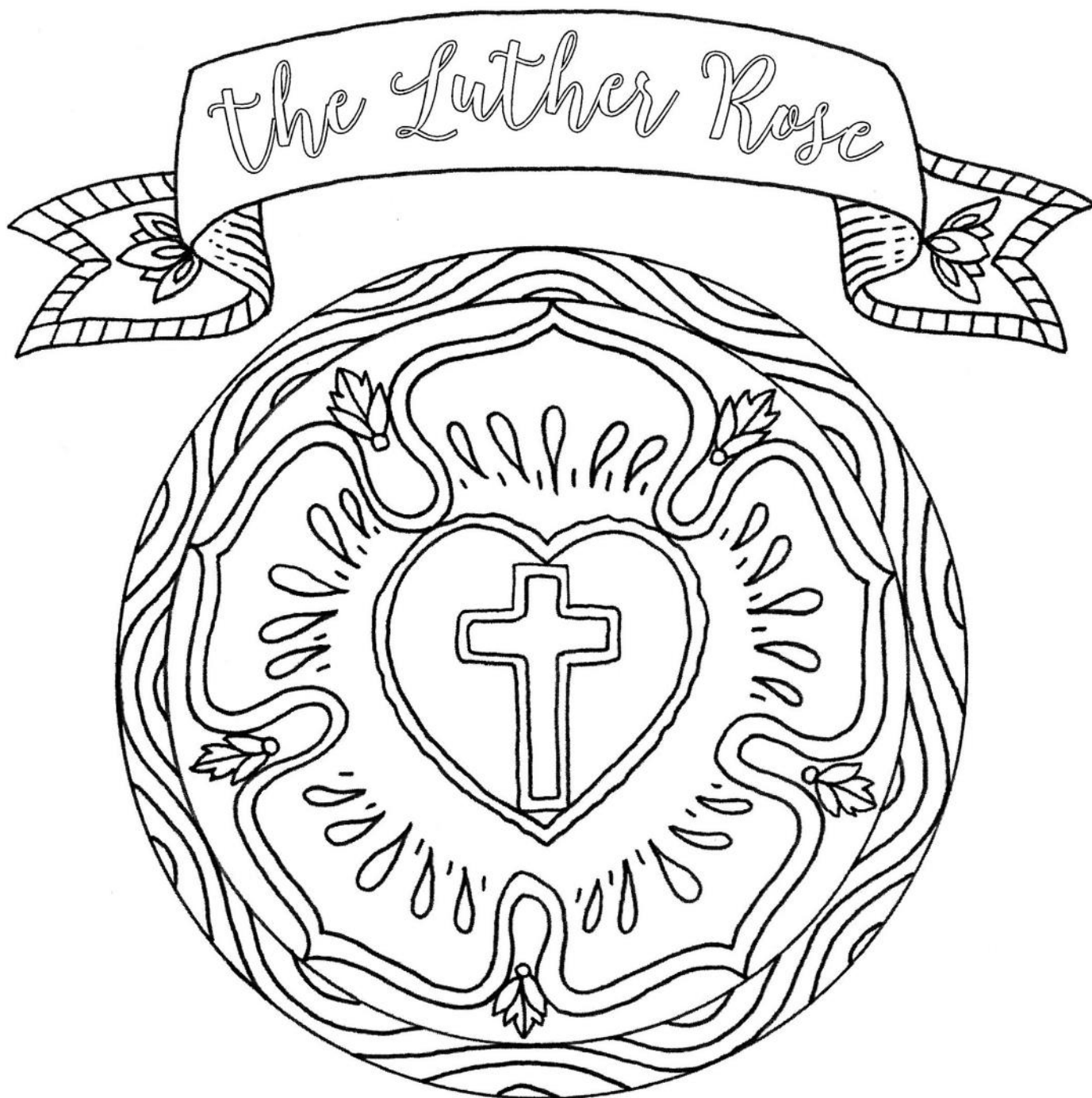
Second, Luther had to address competing views of the Lord's Supper. Luther had successfully refuted the "transubstantiation" view of the Roman church, but the issue was confused by the view that the soul fed on Christ only spiritually, as Calvin later popularized. Others argued that the Sacrament only "represented" Jesus' body. This caused Luther to insist on the real presence, emphasizing that while transubstantiation was in error, it did not mean the solution to that error was to separate the Sacrament from Jesus altogether. Instead, he remained bound to the clear words of Christ, "This is my body."

Third, Luther addressed the problem of good works. Some reformers twisted Luther's doctrine of being justified by grace without works to mean that good works were, in fact, a hindrance to salvation. This caused Luther to argue continually that good works are the proper result of faith. We are justified by faith alone, nevertheless, Christians should lead a sanctified life.

Luther became an internationally important figure. Wittenberg was a destination for young thinkers, and Luther was a hero to many. Students began taking note of everything he said; his publications were spread widely, and princes asked him for advice. Luther was least comfortable with this last political role. He was not a skilled politician and would sometimes be too aggressive in his responses.

Luther's role later in life was to encourage and to instruct. He remained resolved and consistent in his thought, despite feeling pressure from all sides. He was simultaneously heroic in his faith and human in his failings.

THE LUTHERAN CHURCH—MISSOURI SYNOD
ConcordiaHistoricalInstitute.org



A Picture of Luther's Rose to Color. You can find out what colors to use on the back cover.



Messiah Lutheran Church & School

The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod

1308 Whitley Rd. Keller, TX 76248

Church Office: (817) 431-2345

Academy Office: (817) 431-5486

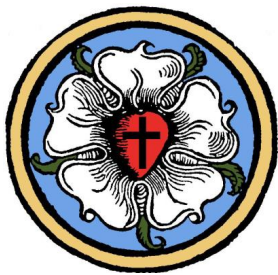
Sunday Worship: 8:00 a.m. & 10:45 a.m.

Sunday School & Adult Bible Class: 9:30 a.m.

Rev. Glenn Huebel, Senior Pastor

Rev. Thomas Chryst, Associate Pastor

www.messiahkeller.org



Luther's Explanation of His Seal

Grace and peace from the Lord. As you desire to know whether my painted seal, which you sent to me, has hit the mark, I shall answer most amiably and tell you my original thoughts and reason about why my seal is a symbol of my theology. The first should be a black cross in a heart, which retains its natural color, so that I myself would be reminded that faith in the Crucified saves us. "For one who believes from the heart will be justified" (Romans 10:10). Although it is indeed a black cross, which mortifies and which should also cause pain, it leaves the heart in its natural color. It does not corrupt nature, that is, it does not kill but keeps alive. "The just shall live by faith" (Romans 1:17) but by faith in the crucified. Such a heart should stand in the middle of a white rose, to show that faith gives joy, comfort, and peace. In other words, it places the believer into a white, joyous rose, for this faith does not

give peace and joy like the world gives (John 14:27). That is why the rose should be white and not red, for white is the color of the spirits and the angels (cf. Matthew 28:3; John 20:12). Such a rose should stand in a sky-blue field, symbolizing that such joy in spirit and faith is a beginning of the heavenly future joy, which begins already, but is grasped in hope, not yet revealed. And around this field is a golden ring, symbolizing that such blessedness in Heaven lasts forever and has no end. Such blessedness is exquisite, beyond all joy and goods, just as gold is the most valuable, most precious and best metal. This is my compendium theologiae [summary of theology]. I have wanted to show it to you in good friendship, hoping for your appreciation. May Christ, our beloved Lord, be with your spirit until the life hereafter. Amen.

Lesser-Known Tidbits about Two Favorite Reformation Hymns by Kantor Vicki Main



"A MIGHTY FORTRESS" IN LUTHER'S HAND

A Mighty Fortress Is Our God

This hymn is often called the battle hymn of the Reformation, and it is even categorized under "The Church Militant" in *Lutheran Service Book*. However, Luther intended this hymn to be one of comfort. It is based on the words of Psalm 46 and is known

for encouraging the faith of those who sing it. From what is known about Luther's spiritual struggles, it is no wonder he wrote and sang a hymn like this.

In 1617, "A Mighty Fortress" was sung during celebrations of the one hundredth anniversary of the Reformation. By that time, settings of the hymn involved choir, congregation, and instruments, just like those we use today.

Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word

The year 1543 found the Holy Roman Empire and the Ottoman Empire at war, and Martin Luther published this hymn with the note "A children's hymn, to be sung against the two arch-enemies of Christ and His holy Church, the Pope and the Turk." So Luther was clearly influenced by current events when

he wrote "Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Our Word."

Luther wrote this hymn fairly late in his life and it was one of the last hymns he wrote. The tune is possibly based on the same medieval chant that is the model for "Savior of the Nations, Come." The translation we use in *Lutheran Service Book* is by Catherine Winkworth, who translated the hymn in the nineteenth century for her *Chorale Book for England*.

