Today we are celebrate the festival of the Reform, but when did reformation begin? Lutherans generally look at Oct 31, 1517, when the Martin Luther posted the 95 Theses on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg.

There are others who prefer a different date, June 25, 1530, the day when a group of German princes presented Emperor Charles V with the Augsburg Confession, a document that defined and defended the teachings of the Lutheran church.

If you don't like either of these choices, how about 1514? That was when Luther had his so-called tower experience, when the Lord led him to realize that the righteousness that matters before God is not the righteousness that individuals bring to God by obeying the law but rather the righteousness God himself gives through faith in Jesus Christ.

When did reformation begin? It was not in 1514 or 1517 or 1530. The Reformation began in the Garden of Eden, and it was the Lord himself who did the reforming. When Adam and Eve disobeyed God, they lost the perfect image of God in which they had been created. But God reformed them with a promise, a promise to undo everything the serpent had done, the promise of a Savior who would destroy the devil's work.

Ad the Lord’s reforming work did not stop there. God uses the same message to bring about the same kind of reformation today. The good news of salvation through Jesus continues to change hearts and lives.

For this reason, reformation is not a fixed date or a period in church history. Because the love of God never changes, because the Word of God is living and active, children of the Reformation can say with certainty that: REFORMATION NEVER ENDS. The gospel message reforms hearts and lives.

When the apostle John wrote the book of Revelation, the Christians living in Asia Minor (modern day Turkey) were under fire. The Roman Empire had taken a strong anti-Christian position, and in order to destroy this new religion they went after its leaders. Some were persecuted. Others were executed. John’s life was spared, but because of his allegiance to Jesus he was exiled on the island of Patmos.

Fear was something that first century Christians experienced on a daily basis. They feared for their lives, and they probably feared for the life of the church itself. Will I survive? Will my Christian friends survive? Will the Christian Church survive? Will the gospel survive? These were the questions that weighed heavily on many a Christian heart, maybe even John's heart.

It looked like it would only be a matter of time before the Romans achieved their objective. It looked like the Christian Church would never reach its 100th birthday. It looked like the gospel would be lost forever. But looks can be deceiving, and in this case, they were.

The mighty Romans could not stand against the almighty God, who declared: The gospel will not be suppressed! The church will never be destroyed! And if John ever had any doubts, the Lord removed them with a spectacular vision in Revelation 14. John reports: Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth - to every nation, tribe, language and people.

The word, angel, means messenger, and the gospel bearing angel in John's vision reminds us that the Lord always has and always will send forth his messengers. What did that mean for John, who was lonely and alone in exile? It was God's way of assuring John that the gospel message would not die with him on that island.

What does that mean for us? It is God's way of assuring us that he will always preserve the
truth. It is God's way of assuring us that he will always raise up messengers to proclaim the truth. It is God's way of reminding us that we are his messengers.

God has called us to proclaim the eternal gospel to every nation, tribe, language and people. And by God's grace we've answered that call. Through our synod's gospel outreach efforts the Lord is reforming hearts all over the world, hearts of people who speak German and Spanish and Russian and Mandarin.

John's vision is coming true today. This is not just a wonderful blessing, it is a miracle. It is a miracle that the gospel is being proclaimed around the world because it is a message that is not natural for sinful people to share. In fact, it is message that self-centered sinners do not even want to hear.

Before we can accept the fact that Jesus is our Savior, we need to admit that we need a Savior. In order to acknowledge that we need a Savior, we have to first come to the conclusion that we cannot save ourselves. And that is not easy.

When Isaiah writes that all our righteous acts are like filthy rags, that is hard for our sinful pride to swallow. Or when Paul writes: There is no one who does good, not even one, that does not do much for our self-esteem. Instead of comparing ourselves with a perfect God, we prefer to compare ourselves with imperfect people. We want to feel good about ourselves. We want to rely on ourselves. We want to be in control of our own eternal destiny.

There is only one problem with that kind of approach. It does not work. Ask Martin Luther. He tried it. He tried to be a good person. He was constantly striving to be a better person. He dedicated his life to serving God. He even beat his body to appease God. But nothing worked. Nothing Luther did could remove the sin and guilt and fear in his heart. Nothing could make him righteous in the sight of God. Nothing except the gospel, which God revealed to Luther in all its beauty and simplicity in Romans 3: No one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the law and the prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.

Those words make the gates of heaven open wide. Those words opened Luther's eyes to see the amazing grace of God. Those words helped Luther understand that righteousness before God is not something that a person must achieve, but a gift that God gives. Jesus paid our debt. Jesus died for our sins. Jesus has forgiven our sins. Jesus has done it all. That is a message, that is the only message, that can reform hearts, but it does not stop there. Once the gospel message reforms our hearts, it also reforms our lives.

The angel in John's vision declared in a loud voice: Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water.

Luther the Reformer took those words very seriously. He knew what it meant to fear God, but the holy terror he used to feel had been replaced by a holy awe. Luther cherished every opportunity to worship his Lord and Savior, and he made it his life's work to make it easier for others to do the same.

He translated the Bible into the language of the people. He composed hymns to help people learn and retain the key truths of Scripture. He wrote the Catechism to help Christian parents train their children. Every sermon he preached, every hymn he composed, every commentary he wrote (and he wrote a lot of them) was an act of worship.

Today our worship has a Reformation flavor. Today we give thanks to God for our Lutheran heritage. But neither Luther nor the God he served would want us to think of worship only in terms of 1 or 2 hours a week. The gospel message transforms us, and the Lord wants us to view our
lives as our spiritual act of worship.

We worship God when we sing *A Mighty Fortress*, but we can also worship him by putting in an honest day's work for an honest day's pay. I serve the Lord as a pastor, but you can serve him in your God-given role as a teacher or a student or a husband or a wife or a white-collar worker or a blue-collar worker. When we pray in private and when we are out in public, when we are engaged in deep conversation or quiet meditation, every moment of every day is an opportunity for God's people to give glory to God.

Every time we celebrate Reformation is a good time for us to review the watchwords of the Reformation. Perhaps you remember those two-word Lat phrases: sola gratia, sola fide, sola Scriptura. By grace alone. By faith alone. By Scripture alone.

By grace alone – we are saved not because there is anything inherently good in us or because God is somehow obligated to us, but because we are the recipients of his undeserved love and mercy.

By faith alone – we are saved, not by performing certain works to earn a place in heaven, but by trusting in the saving work that Jesus accomplished our behalf.

By Scripture alone - God's Word, as it is revealed in the Bible, is the Christian's only guide for this life and the life to come.

There is one more Latin phrase I would like to introduce this morning. It is not a motto of the Lutheran Reformation. It is not even all that Lutheran, but I think that it can be understood correctly in the context of this sermon. The phrase is: semper reformanda: always reforming.

The Reformation is a movement that can be traced back to 16th century Germany, but it was God who introduced the idea of reformation when he announced a plan to save sinful mankind in the Garden of Eden. The Reformation is a church festival that Lutherans celebrate about this time every year, but reformation is a miraculous transformation that the Holy Spirit has produced in every Christian heart and becomes the mark of every Christian life.

As long as the earth endures, as long as there are people on this planet who do not know Jesus as their Savior, there will always be a need for reformation. Because God's Word will never be silenced, the eternal gospel will always be reforming. Because the gospel message changes hearts and lives, reformation never ends. Amen.

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