

Always Reforming
Deuteronomy 34:1-12; Matthew 22:34-46
500th Anniversary of the Protestant Reformation

Have you ever asked yourself why we do not conduct our church services in Latin? Ever wondered why we do not pretend to buy our way into heaven? Or why we are not called Catholic?

It is because of the actions of Martin Luther and what he did for the church on October 31, 1517... 500 years ago! At the age of 34, he had spent the greater part of his life studying the Word of God and had determined that some of the practices of the church were not what God intended for the Body of Christ. And so, led by the Spirit of God, Martin Luther walked to the Castle Church in Wittenberg Germany with his 95 Theses and a hammer. He nailed those 95 reasons for change in the church to the door. The next day would be All Saints Day and hundreds of visitors would come to the church to buy indulgences - forgiveness for the wrongs they had committed. They would see the list, and would agree to hold a debate with him and everyone would hear the truth about God's free forgiveness. Martin Luther had no idea that his hammering would get the attention of people around the world and forever change the church.

Throughout the history of Creation God has called on individuals to make change. Moses heard God's call from a bush of fire, calling for him to lead the Israelites from slavery to freedom in the Promised Land. Abraham heard God's call to be the father of many nations. Jeremiah, Isaiah, David, Ruth, Martha, Mary, Joseph, and even Jesus – along with many others called by God to lead, to go forth, to do, to take action, led by the God through the Holy Spirit. Each one doing their part: each one a part of the whole – and the whole picture still yet to be realized.

Moses did not see the Promised Land. Martin Luther never knew the Reformed Church or the full significance of his actions. Jesus Christ the Messiah, questioned by the Pharisees, persecuted, crucified and buried, was raised from the dead but did not fully understand the impact of all that was happening until he was raised to sit at the right hand of our Lord, thereby fulfilling all that had been written by the psalmist.

Two years ago when I joined you as Intentional Interim Pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Thomasville, my first assessment to you was that this church was on a course headed toward closure. Many of you remember a meeting in the fellowship hall when I asked you to decide and declare if you wanted to close or "do whatever was necessary to remain open and to do ministry to the glory of God." Those of you present that day voted unanimously to "do whatever was necessary" and we began the hard work of re-forming.

Last Sunday the young people of this church, led by the Holy Spirit, led our worship service. WOW! Aden, Billy, Kayden, Nia, Dori, Kaleb, Liza led us in looking at the many ways we are thankful to God. But they did so much more than that. In that worship service I saw children who were here when I came and children who have joined us in the two years I have

been with you. I heard God speaking through children who have been shown the love of God and experienced the love of this congregation because FPC is here and doing what God is calling you to do and to be in this community. You are being re-formed and are transforming lives!

As a result of the Protestant Reformation begun 500 years ago, the church was changed and is changing lives every day. No longer condemning, we offer hope through the grace of God through Jesus Christ. FPC is no longer the church of the 60s and 70s. God is calling us to do a new thing. Today, on Reformation Sunday, what do you think God is calling FPC to do and to be? How is God calling you to re-form as we move forward? You were given a piece of paper as you entered the sanctuary. I ask and invite you to write your ideas on that piece of paper -- your theses -- and during the next hymn come put it on the door as we experience the FPC REFORMATION OF 2017!