

Reformation Day (Years A, B, C)

On Reformation Day the church honours Martin Luther and other reformers of the sixteenth century, and reformers of every age. Luther's teachings focused on the promises of scripture, emphasizing that the Spirit works in our hearts to speak God's word to us and that we receive God's grace through our faith in Christ. This is the truth that makes us free. Our life in the Body of Christ is shaped by this gift of freedom.

Focus Scripture: John 8:31–36

Most scholars believe that the gospel of John was written around 85–90 CE. Jesus' identity and teachings are the priorities in this gospel. John draws us into the new life and understanding of God's purpose that Jesus makes possible.

Reflected in the focus reading today is the struggle within the early church between Jews who accepted Jesus as Messiah and those who did not. This division was probably not as sharp in Jesus' time as the words in John might lead us to believe. When the gospel of John refers to "Jews," it usually is speaking of Jewish religious leaders. It may be helpful to think of the dialogue in John between Jesus and the Jews as a challenging discussion among "family members" who are experiencing a strained relationship.

Verse 30 is a springboard into the focus verses. Jesus has been teaching, and verse 30 reports: "As he was saying these things, many believed in him." Jesus' words to these new believers begin in verse 31.

Living in Jesus' way leads to truth, which in turn leads to freedom. The Jews are puzzled by Jesus' teaching and claim that because they are descendants of Abraham, they are already free. They claim they have never been slaves, neglecting to recall the time of slavery in Egypt or the Babylonian exile.

In John, the writer uses the phrase "very truly I tell you" (v. 34) to signal that a new teaching is to follow. In verses 34–36, Jesus addresses the group's misunderstanding of freedom with the new teaching that everyone who sins is not free and is a slave to sin. Jesus teaches that slavery is not limited to an economic reality, but also is an inward state of being. Even those who claim freedom through Abraham are not as free as they think.

Through Jesus, the Son, we are given a permanent place in the house of God. True freedom comes through Jesus the Christ, not any human ancestor. True freedom comes not from one's heritage, but as a gift from God. Truth for the Jews involved their identity in Abraham; Jesus' truth involves identity in God.

The leaders of the Reformation emphasized the gospel teaching that true freedom is not related to ethnic distinctions or social class. Only Jesus the Christ can free us from slavery to sin, and does so through the truth of the gospel.

Martin Luther felt that the heart of gospel truth is summed up in **Romans 3:19–28**. All people fall short in their relationship with God, but God offers forgiveness of sins through Christ. We are justified – put right with God – by the gift of God's grace, through faith in Christ.

The Hebrew exiles in Babylon blamed the slavery of exile on their ancestors who had disregarded God's law. In **Jeremiah 31:31–34**, the prophet envisions a future time when the ability to know God and God's truth will be a gift from God, written on each heart.

Psalm 46 is the inspiration behind Luther's classic Reformation hymn, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God." The words of the psalmist, and the words of Luther, call disciples to place their hope in God alone.

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Scripture calls us to live with God's law on our hearts, to let our faith determine how we act. Jesus invites us to open our hearts to receive God's gifts of grace and salvation – to claim our freedom in Christ. What in the church today needs to be reformed by God's grace? What might you and your church do differently through the reforming, restoring power of the Holy Spirit?



Focus Scripture
John 8:31–36

Additional Scriptures
Jeremiah 31:31–34
Psalm 46
Romans 3:19–28

**Gracious God,
write your law on
our hearts and
let your word of
grace dwell in us
so that no matter
where we are, we
may know we are
forgiven and free.
Amen.**

The Focus for Ages 3–5

By the age of five, children can begin to appreciate that there are people of their faith tradition who lived long, long ago but their stories are not found in the Bible. Martin Luther is one of those key people of faith, and his name may be familiar to some of the children in your group. The story of Martin Luther can help children hear about the importance of the stories in the Bible as they learn about how Luther focused so much of his life on making the Bible accessible to people of faith. Martin Luther also had a concern for speaking the truth – something else that these young ones are beginning to understand and talk about. Priscilla the puppet playfully opens the session this week with a game: one of speaking about objects with obvious inac-

curacy and having the children make the corrections – speaking the truth. You can use any hand puppet for this activity, or you can introduce the game without the use of a puppet.

As usual, there are places where you, as leader and person of the faith tradition, have an opportunity to “fill in” with your own touches of teaching and experience. For example, when the children have made their own little Bibles and decorated the covers, you have an opportunity to add your own reflection on what they have just done: “Imagine decorating the cover of the Bible. I wonder if Martin Luther ever did that? Perhaps Martin asked the children to do that just like you have.” Pray that the children will hear in today’s session Martin Luther’s passion for God.

Prepare

Before the session

- ❑ Prayerfully reflect on the focus scripture, John 8:31–36, and biblical background information (p. 1).
- ❑ Gather items for the worship area: *red fabric*, *Christ candle*, and *Bible* with bookmark placed in the gospel of John.
- ❑ Bring *candlesnuffer* and *matches*.
- ❑ Decorate the room with *red items* (such as streamers, paper hearts, balloons).
- ❑ Bring *CD player*, if possible.

Gather

- ❑ Bring song “*God’s Family*” (#12 *Seasons Music CD, volume 7*), or “*Following Where Jesus Leads*” (#14 *Seasons Music CD, volume 8*), or “*We Thank You God*” (#22 *Seasons Music CD, volume 9*). All recordings also available as *Seasons mp3 downloads*.
- ❑ Bring *Priscilla, the puppet*, or another *hand puppet*; place *red item* (such as a ribbon, hat, or scarf) on the puppet.
- ❑ Bring a bag of *common objects* (such as a pencil, Bible, ball, or small toy).

Engage

- ❑ Bring *resource sheets* “*Bible Stories for Everyone: Martin Luther*” (p. 5) and “*Martin Luther’s Family*” (p. 6).

- ❑ Bring a *children’s Bible* or a variety of *Bible story picture books*.
- ❑ Bring *heart-shaped cookies/biscuits, frosting/icing* and *sprinkles*.
- ❑ Bring song “*Somlandela/We Will Follow*” (#22 on *Seasons Music CD, volume 7*) or “*Oh, Will You Follow Me*” (p. 21 in *Seasons Growing Faith Songbook*, #14 on *Seasons Growing Faith Music CD*). Both recordings also available as *mp3 downloads*.

Respond

Choose from the options provided. Prepare and bring the materials.

- ❑ **Bookmark:** *poster board bookmark shapes, red decorating items* (such as paper hearts, stickers, foam shapes), *art supplies* (such as markers, coloured pencils, crayons), *clear adhesive covering, red yarn, hole punch*
- ❑ **Storybook:** *copies of resource sheet “Our Special Book”* (p. 7)
- ❑ **Party:** *variety of costumes* (such as robes, Ages 3–5 T-shirts, yarn or tie belts, towels, headbands), *mirror* (optional)

Bless

- ❑ Bring song “*Circle Song*” (#11 *Seasons Music CD, volume 7*; also available as a *Seasons mp3 download*).



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Scripture

John 8:31–36

FOCUS To imagine what it might have been like to hear Martin Luther tell stories about Jesus.

Gather

Welcome the children and invite them to notice all the red decorations. Mention that this is a very special day called Reformation Day, and red is a colour that we use to celebrate this day. It is a day when we celebrate a person named Martin Luther, who loved Jesus very much.

Opening ritual

Gather in the worship space. Invite a child to spread the red cloth on the table, and place the Bible and the candle on it. Point to the Bible and say:

The Bible is a special book of the church.
From the Bible, we hear stories of God's love.
From the Bible, we hear stories of people who loved God.

Light the candle and say:

The candle reminds us of stories that show God's loving, welcoming ways.

Sing "God's Family" (#12 on *Seasons Music CD, volume 7*), or "Following Where Jesus Leads" (#14 on *Seasons Music CD, volume 8*), or "We Thank You God" (#22 on *Seasons Music CD, volume 9*).

Pray Dear God,
we feel your love all around us
wherever we go,
and whatever we do. Amen.

Extinguish the candle as a sign that the opening liturgy has ended.

Priscilla, the puppet, introduces the theme

Welcome Priscilla, who is wearing something red and is holding a bag of objects.

Priscilla: Hello, (*name each child*). What a happy day this is! And look at all the red that I see.

Leader: Yes, Priscilla. We are celebrating Reformation Day. We are going to learn about a very special person called Martin Luther.

Priscilla: I know, and that's why I brought this bag. We are going to play a game.

Leader: Would you like to tell us about it?

Priscilla: Well, I heard that Martin Luther always wanted to speak the truth so...let's play a game where we will speak the truth. (*Have Priscilla initiate the game.*)

Game Bring one of the items out of the paper bag and have Priscilla describe it incorrectly. For example, show a pencil and say that it is a ball and it bounces on the floor. Encourage children to correct Priscilla and tell her the truth about that object. Continue with Priscilla incorrectly naming the other objects and the children responding.

Leader: That was fun, Priscilla. That was a game and we were being very silly. But at other times when we aren't playing a game, why do you think it is important to always tell the truth? (*Priscilla encourages the children to answer.*)

Priscilla: I know that Martin Luther spoke the truth. Are we going to learn some other things about Martin Luther?

Leader: Yes, Priscilla. (*Place Priscilla nearby.*)

If not using Priscilla, the puppet, mention that Martin Luther always wanted to speak the truth. Then, play the game and encourage the children to talk about why they think it is important to always tell the truth.

Engage

Invite a child to bring the Bible from the worship table and use the bookmark to open it to the gospel of John. Use the resource sheet "Bible Stories for Everyone: Martin Luther" to tell the story.

After the story

Poem "This Is Our Bible"

This is our Bible (*put hands together*),
our special book.

Open it up and take a good look (*open hands*).

Tales of God's people from long, long ago,
stories of Jesus that we want to know.
This is our Bible (*put hands together*),
our special book.

Open it up and take a good look (*open hands*).
Stories of God's love. Stories that say...
God loves us forever. God loves us today!

Reformation celebration Decorate heart-shaped cookies/biscuits with frosting/icing and sprin-

gles. Sit together and say a simple prayer. While they are enjoying their snack play the following music.

Listen to "Somlandela/We Will Follow" (#22 in *Seasons Music CD, volume 7*) or, "Oh, Will You Follow Me" (p. 21 in *Seasons Growing Faith Songbook, #14 in Seasons Growing Faith Music CD*).

Respond

Choose from the following activities.

- Bookmark** Marking special stories in the Bible will encourage children to find familiar stories on their own. Distribute strips of poster board. Provide art supplies and the variety of red items and invite children to decorate their bookmarks. Cover the bookmarks with clear adhesive covering, punch a hole in the top, and add a red yarn tassel.
- Storybook** Martin Luther wanted all people everywhere to know about God and Jesus. Martin loved telling Bible stories to his children and he wrote books so all people could read



the stories in their own languages. Distribute copies of the resource sheet "Our Special Book" and help children cut and fold their little storybooks. Recall some of the stories in the Bible together and encourage the children to draw their own pictures of these stories.

- Party** Invite children to celebrate Reformation Day by providing costumes and encouraging children to dress up as people from biblical times. Ask children who they are and what they are doing. Enjoy their stories! Read together some stories from the Bible storybooks used during Engage.

Bless

Gather around the worship table. Light the candle. Join hands in a circle.

Sing "Circle Song" (#11 *Seasons Music CD, volume 7*). Encourage everyone to clap to the rhythm of this song.

Pray Thank you, God,
for the gift of the Bible.
Help us to learn about you
when we read it. Amen.

Extinguish the candle.

Send each child out with the words, "(Child's name), God will love you forever."

Reflect

In what ways are the children and you experiencing God's presence in your time together?



Story Tip

It is important to tell a story as you feel it. If you enjoy it, the children will too.

Bible Stories for Everyone

Martin Luther

(Show the picture of Martin Luther and his family from resource sheet "Martin Luther's Family." Introduce his wife Katherine and their six children.)

Martin Luther loved God. Martin Luther loved Jesus.

And Martin Luther knew that many people loved God and Jesus.

But Martin Luther wanted to help the people know God even more. Martin thought that the people did not know all the good things God wanted for them. "I will help the people," Martin said.

"I will write some songs about God's love." And that's what he did. Martin wrote many, many songs that people still sing today.

"I will write books about God's love." And that's what he did. Martin wrote books to help parents and their children learn the story of God's love.

"I will write the Bible again in a language the people will understand." And that's what he did. Martin rewrote the Bible so the people could read it themselves.

Martin Luther was very busy. Martin Luther loved God and brought the good news of the Bible to many, many people.

Show the children's Bible and Bible storybooks and ask the children questions such as:

- What kinds of stories might be inside these books?
- Can you find a picture of Jesus?
- Can you find a picture of someone who loved God?

Martin Luther loved telling Bible stories to his children. Read one or two very short books or Bible stories about Jesus. Invite the children to imagine that they are the children of Martin Luther. Ask them to help you choose which stories you will read. Encourage interaction with the children.

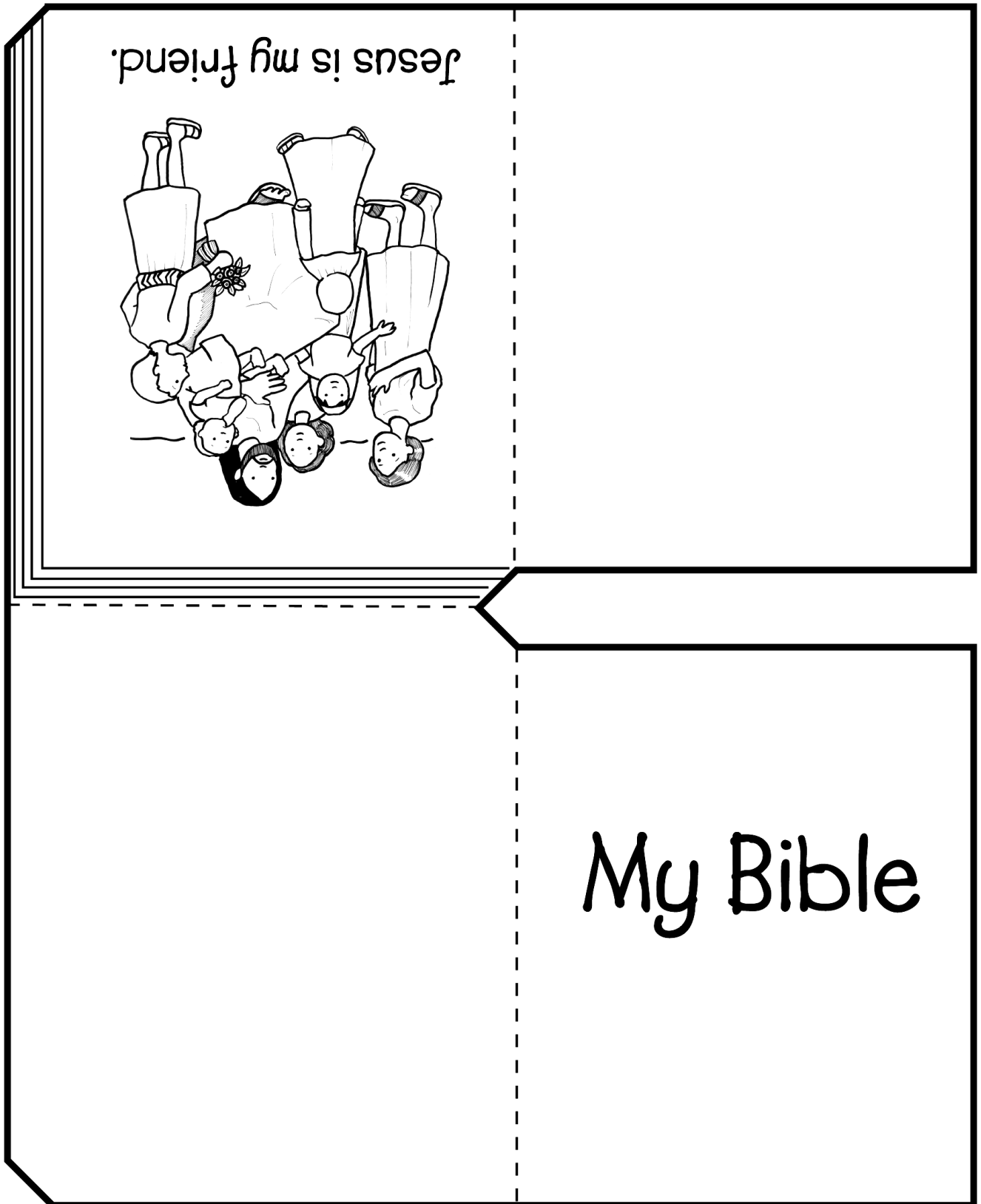


Martin Luther's Family





Our Special Book



Jesus is my friend.

My Bible