

# 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 9–11

The children in your group will probably not see much difference between someone living 500 years ago and someone living 200 years ago or even 1000 years ago. For these children, such distant times blur together and they may be more interested in the actual stories than the historical setting. They are aware of family stories of relatives, especially famous relatives. On Reformation Day they have a chance to hear the story of Martin Luther, an important person in the story of the Christian church family. It is one of the great stories of the Christian tradition.

Children in this age group are often quite aware of what is true and untrue, and what is fair and unfair. They will hear, in Martin's story, about someone who stood up for what he believed. Luther studied and thought hard over many parts of the Bible, and wanted all

believers to have the freedom to do that. Just as Jesus' teachings challenged the religious leaders, so did Martin Luther, who based his ideas on what he read about Jesus in the Bible. Martin's story might inspire the children in their own journeys of faith.

The freedom and grace that Luther found in his studies is partly from the freedom that Jesus talks about in the gospel of John in the focus passage for this session. Children will have an opportunity to learn how Martin Luther, through his desire to know as much about God as he could discover through reading and studying the Bible, made such a difference to the Christian way. Pray that the children will find a role model in this important figure in church history and be inspired in their own journeys of faith.

## Prepare

### Before the session

- Prayerfully reflect on the focus scripture, John 8:31–36, and the biblical background material (p. 1).
- Prepare a worship table with *red fabric*, *white pillar candle*, and *Bible* with a bookmark placed at John 8.
- Bring *candlesnuffer* and *matches*.
- Bring *CD player*, if possible.
- Decorate the room with *red items* (such as streamers, paper hearts, balloons).

### Gather

- Bring song "Teach Me Wisdom" (#24 on *Seasons Music CD, volume 7*) or "We Thank You, God" (#22 on *Seasons Music CD, volume 9*); both recordings also available as *Seasons mp3 downloads*.
- Make *two signs*: one saying "No way!" and one saying "Yes!"

### Engage

- Bring *Bibles*.
- Bring *copies of resource sheets "Martin Luther"* (p. 5) and "*Luther's Crest*" (p. 6).

### Respond

Choose from the following suggested activities. Prepare and bring the materials.

- Bookmarks:** *construction paper or card stock/heavy paper, art supplies, scissors*
- Crest:** *construction paper (black, white, red, green, blue), gold paper, glue sticks, markers or coloured pencils, scissors*
- Collage:** *sheet of poster board, used magazines, craft and collage supplies, glue sticks, scissors*

### Bless

- Bring song "Somlandela/We Will Follow" (#22 on *Seasons Music CD, volume 7*; also available as a *Seasons mp3 download*).



# Reformation Day (Years A, B, C)

## Scripture

John 8:31–36

**FOCUS** To understand how Jesus' words set Martin Luther free to tell people about God's truth in a new way.

## Gather

**Welcome** the children and visitors and invite them to notice all the red decorations. Explain that red is a colour that is used for special, festival days in the church year. Mention that today we are celebrating Reformation Day. It is the day we remember Martin Luther, an important figure in the history of our church.

### Opening ritual

**Gather** in the worship space and invite a child to light the Christ candle.

**Pray** the following prayer, or one of your own:

Loving God, accept our gifts  
and make us aware of your presence  
as we come to your church  
to learn how to be your people. Amen.

**Sing** the song "Teach Me Wisdom" (#24 on *Seasons Music CD, volume 7*) or "We Thank You, God" (#22 on *Seasons Music CD, volume 9*).

### Connect with the focus

On one side of your meeting space place the sign saying "Yes!" and on the opposite side place the sign saying "No way!" Invite the children to play a game where they will move to the signs to indicate their agreement or disagreement with statements such as "Team sports are fun to play; I love spicy food; Brushing teeth is important; People should always speak out against things that are unfair." Talk together about how it is easier to share how we feel about some things more than other things. Today we will hear the story about Martin Luther who shared his feelings about some important issues in the church and stood up for what he believed in, helping to make important changes in the church.

## Engage

### Preparing for the Bible story

Remind the children that we are still in the Season after Pentecost, a part of the church year that is also known as Ordinary or Common Time. Today is a special day in this season. It is called Reformation Day, and it is a time when we celebrate changes that took place in the Christian church about 500 years ago. The person most closely connected with those changes is Martin Luther. Read "Part 1" from the resource sheet "Martin Luther" to the group. Ask:

- **What was Martin Luther's worry?**
- **What helped Martin Luther to feel better?**

Distribute copies of the resource sheet "Martin Luther" to the children. Ask for one or two volunteers to read the first section of "Part 2." Talk together about what it might have been like to live in a time when most people couldn't read books, and

when books, even the Bible, were very scarce. Ask:

- **How would life be different from what it is today?**

Ask for one or two volunteers to read the second section of "Part 2." Ask:

- **What ways did Martin Luther use to encourage people to learn from the Bible?**
- **Why do you think it was so important to Martin that people know about God's love?**

Following this conversation, read "Part 3" on the resource sheet and invite any questions or comments.

### The Bible story

Jesus' teachings in the Bible were important to Martin Luther in his studies to understand God and God's way. In one part of the gospel of John, the focus passage for this session, Jesus teaches about

freedom to follow God's way. Invite children to find **John 8:34–36** in their Bibles, asking one or more volunteers to read these verses aloud. Just as Martin Luther helped people to study the Bible 500 years ago by translating it into a language they could understand, the verses of the Bible today are sometimes re-written in words that people can understand more easily. Distribute copies of the resource sheet "Luther's Crest." Read aloud the paraphrase of **John 8:34–36** from the top of the page and then have the group read it in unison.

- **What might Martin Luther have found encouraging in these words of Jesus?**
- **What did words like these in the Bible give him the courage to do?**

### The Bible in our lives

Jesus' message about God's love was important for Martin Luther and is important for us today too.

- **How might Jesus' words, and the story of Martin Luther, help you to live in God's way?**

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## Respond

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Select one or two of the following options.

- Bookmarks** Martin Luther wanted everyone to be able to read the Bible. Distribute supplies and invite children make bookmarks for a Bible. Suggest that they put words or symbols on their bookmarks that remind them of the freedom that we have as followers of Jesus to live in God's way. They might also like to add an image of Luther's crest as a reminder about how important the Bible was for Martin Luther.
- Crest** The crest that we associate with Martin Luther is a reminder of the Bible messages that were so important for him. Distribute supplies and refer to the information on the resource sheet "Luther's Crest" to help children make



their own copies of the crest. Have them cut shapes from construction paper: a circle of blue, green leaves, white rose, red heart, and black cross, and glue these in layers onto a circle of gold paper. As they work, invite the children to think of other things the different parts of Luther's crest might represent.

- Collage** Martin Luther had a strong desire to explore God's words and wisdom in the Bible. Read again the paraphrase on the top of the resource sheet "Luther's Crest" and invite children to name some ways we can follow in God's way today. Have them create a group collage, using the supplies provided, to illustrate what it means to be one of Jesus' disciples today.

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## Bless

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**Gather** Bring the group together around the worship table. Light the Christ candle.

**Sing or listen to** the song "Somlandela/We Will Follow" (#22 on *Seasons Music CD, volume 7*).

**Pray** this prayer or one of your own:

God of all people and times,  
we give thanks for all the people in history

who have taught us how to follow your way.

In Jesus' name. Amen.

**Blessing** Offer a blessing to each child: "(Child's name), remember that Jesus has made you free to follow God's way."

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## Reflect

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How did the children show their interest in the story of Martin Luther and the time in which he lived? How did this session encourage your own

desire to know more about Luther, or to study the Bible?



# MARTIN LUTHER

**PART 1** Martin Luther lived in Germany about 500 years ago. As a young man, Luther became a Roman Catholic monk. He was devoted to God, but he was also frightened of God's anger. Martin Luther knew that he could not keep all of God's commandments, and he feared that God would punish him.

Luther was told that if he gave money to the church when he sinned, God wouldn't punish him. But this didn't stop him worrying. Martin Luther prayed and studied the Bible, searching for some assurance that God would not punish him. He found it in the Bible, and he no longer believed that paying money to the church was necessary for forgiveness.

**PART 2** But not everyone could read the Bible and get the message that Martin Luther did. In Luther's time, most people couldn't read. Besides, the Bible was written in languages that the people could not understand. And even if they could, Bibles were so scarce that in many places the only Bible in the community was chained to the church pulpit.

Luther believed that everyone deserved to be able to read it so each person would know the truth about God's love. He translated the Bible

into German so all the people in Germany could read it. He put the messages from the Bible to music, familiar German songs, so the people could learn it by singing. He wrote a catechism, a set of questions and answers, to help parents teach their children about God and Jesus. Fortunately, about this time the mechanical printing press was invented so copies of books could be made without copying them by hand. This printing method made the production of books faster and cheaper.

**PART 3** Luther continued to read and study the Bible. He was now more certain than ever that forgiveness could not be bought. According to the Bible, forgiveness is a free gift from God.

The more Luther studied the Bible, the more teachings of the church he decided were wrong. Finally, Luther made a list of 95 church teachings that he couldn't agree with. Luther nailed the list to the door of the castle church in Wittenberg, Germany, on October 31, 1517. That event marked the beginning of the Reformation.





# Luther's Crest

Seriously, I tell you, if you don't follow God's way you can become like a slave to other ways. But if you listen to me, I can bring you back to God's way and you will be free from those other ways. When I make you free, you are really free.

– a paraphrase of Jesus' words in John 8:34–36



**I**n the middle of Martin Luther's crest is a black cross. The cross reminds us of Jesus' death and resurrection. The cross is on a red heart. The heart reminds us that our faith keeps us alive. The heart is in the middle of a white rose with green leaves. The rose and greenery remind us of our joy in belonging to God. The

background behind the rose is blue like the sky. The sky reminds us of heavenly joy. Around all of this is a circle of gold. The circle is a symbol of the endless joy of belonging to God, which is more precious than anything else.