THE LUTHERAN CHURCH—500 YEARS LATER

June 18, 2017

It will be 500 years this October 31, 1517 that an unknown monk by the name of Martin Luther walked, hammer and paper in hand to the castle church in Wittenberg, Germany to make his displeasure known about the sale of indulgences in the Catholic Church.

Luther’s posting of the 95 theses brought to the attention of the people of Germany the questionable practice of selling for money the forgiveness of sins by the Roman Catholic church.

Indulgences got their start during the Crusades against the Mohammedans. Unless a crusader who died in battle did sufficient penance for his sins, he might still be among the lost in hell. To meet this need, the popes of the 11th century began to grant absolution for all their transgressions to Christian warriors who died in battle.

This was a special indulgence. As time went on other indulgences were invented that the common man could purchase to pay the penalty for sin and shorten their time in purgatory. Then a chart of charges was drawn up that showed what you would pay for an indulgence according to your station in life.

Kings and bishops had to pay about $350.

Businessmen about $40-$80.

A tradesman about $15.

The poor about $6.

The destitute—free.

Luther’s own church members bought them and felt no need to repent of sins since they were forgiven by the indulgence that they bought.

Now they had no need for Jesus and the forgiveness He purchased with His blood. It’s easy to see why Martin Luther and others before him spoke out against this worthless piece of paper.

Even though Martin Luther spoke out against the use of indulgences, he was still a catholic by birth and it was some time before he had identified all the catholic teachings that were contrary to the teaching of Scriptures.

Luther and others compiled, from the Scriptures, what it is that one must believe as a Christian. These confessions are the Augsburg Confession of 1530,the Apology to the Augsburg Confession of 1531, The Smalcald Articles of 1537, The Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope, The Small and Large Catechisms, and The Formula of Concord.

These are all Bible-based and are a clear statement of what we Lutherans believe.

From 1517 until his death in 1546, Martin Luther wrote, preached and in league with other like-minded people, shepherded what would become known as the Lutheran Church through tumultuous times.

The other Martin, Martin Chemnitz was the one God chose to bring order out of chaos after the death of Martin Luther and after a military defeat of the Lutheran forces by the Catholic forces in 1547. The Confessions referred to above were put into a single volume called the Book of Concord of 1580.

In Confirmation class, we use Luther’s Small Catechism and I always introduce the students to what is in the Book of Concord which contains the doctrines or teachings that they will say is what they believe.

Our Lutheran forefathers have passed down to us, in the Book of Concord, the true faith as it is found in the writings of the Prophets and Apostles. It was just last Sunday, Trinity Sunday, that we confessed our faith in the words of the Athanasian Creed, which states at the beginning and the end: “Whoever desires to be saved must, above all, hold the catholic or universal faith. Whoever does not keep it whole and undefiled will without doubt perish eternally.”

Unfortunately, the Lutheran Church has become fragmented over the years due to the influence of satan, who caused some to not accept as true what Scripture so clearly says.

Already in the days of Martin Luther, Pastor Ulrich Swingli could not accept the Biblical teaching of the ‘Real Presence’ in the Lord’s Supper. He held to a symbolical presence, in spite of what Jesus said on that Thursday evening in the upper room: “Take eat, this IS My body; take drink, this IS My blood.” Swingli went on to help form the Anabaptist Church, called today the Baptists. They still hold to a symbolical presence in the Lord’s Supper. Meaning that they don’t believe that they actually receive the true body and blood of the Lord.

The ELCA have also decided to not believe all that Scripture says on various teachings, such as: Abortion does not break the 5th Commandment. The Bible is not true in all it says. Women can also be ministers even though the Bible says that a pastor must be the husband of one wife.

The LC-MS is a Confessional Church in that our confession of faith is Bible-based. When you talk about what we believe, there are Fundamental Beliefs that you must believe to be saved. Like, Jesus is the only Savior of the world. And there are non-fundamental beliefs, such as the office of the papacy is the anti-christ. We can disagree on non-fundamental, and still be saved. But there is no wiggle room on Fundamental.

Our church body has had its problems over the years but the Lord has blessed us, keeping our church doctrinally faithful and strong, being highly respected in the world for our strong Biblical stance. This is what our Synodical President, Dr. Matt Harrison told us at our District Convention 3 years ago.

We believe what the Bible says. May the Good Lord always keep us faithful to His Word.