Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Through the prophet Jeremiah today, we hear the Lord proclaim that a new covenant will be made and then we hear the Lord proclaim this:

> I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. (Jeremiah 31:33b)

The new covenant that Jeremiah is proclaiming is the word of the Lord, written on our hearts. It is that "thing" deep within us that guides our heart and our mind by God's love for us, it is that thing deep within us that guides our heart and our actions, it is that thing we call a conscience that is guided by the Holy Spirit and our faith. This faith given to us from God is an agreement, it is the new covenant that brings about a relationship of commitment between God and his people and this covenant is sealed in blood. From the Letter to the Hebrews, which is basically an argument for the finality of salvation achieved by Jesus Christ, we hear this about the purpose of the new everlasting covenant and why it is sealed in the blood of Jesus Christ:

> Hence not even the first covenant was inaugurated without blood. [19] For when every commandment had been told to all the people by Moses in accordance with the law, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the scroll itself and all the people, [20] saying, "This is the blood of the covenant that God has ordained for you." [21] And in the same way he sprinkled with the blood both the tent and all the vessels used in worship. [22] Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins. (Hebrews 9:18-22)

It is the blood of Jesus Christ, the Word of God, that has sealed this new covenant with God and with us. It is through His blood that was shed for us that we have forgiveness of our sins. And from the prologue of the Gospel of John we hear this about the Word that is sealed in blood:

> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. [2] He was in the beginning with God.
> [14] And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.
> [16]From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. (John 1:1-2, 14, 16)

This Word that John declares is the Word that has been written on our hearts through a faith that has been given to us from God. This is the Word that brings about a relationship of commitment between God and us, the Word that has been sealed in God's own blood, the blood of the Word of God made flesh…Jesus Christ. This is the New Covenant, the everlasting covenant, that is sealed in blood that frees us from sin and death.

I mention all this about the Word and the blood of the new covenant because on this day we celebrate the Reformation of the Church, it is this Word that is at the very core or the very center of the Reformation. It is this Word that has been written on our hearts that we pray today as a church to remain steadfast in, and it is this Word of truth and life that Jesus himself tells us about in our Gospel lesson:

> "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; [32] and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." (John 8:32)

If you continue in my Word, you are truly my disciples. St. Augustine in a sermon on this same passage that we have before us today, points out that Jesus does not say if you "hear" my word, or "come" to my word, or even "praise" my word, you are truly my disciples. Jesus says, "If you ***continue*** in my Word." Augustine goes on to say that this is hard work, but if it is hard work, look then at the reward. The reward is this Word, it is the Word that is written on our hearts and sealed in the blood of that very Word, Jesus Christ. It is the faith in that Word that saves us from sin and death. It is the Word that Luther stood by and would not move away from or turn his back on. It is the Word that Luther continued in during the 1500s amidst all the corruption within the church.

We know that October 31, 1517 marked the official start of the Lutheran Reformation when Luther posted his *95 Theses* on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany. And for those interested, Ken has a copy of Luther's 95 Theses posted at the door of our church today for you to check out. But where we see Luther continuing in God's Word happens some three-and-a-half years later where we find Luther at the center of the Diet of Worms in April 1521.

The diet of Worms is historically a legislative assembly. Specifically, the Diet of Worms in 1521 was an imperial assembly of the Holy Roman Empire called by Emperor Charles V. At the start of this assembly, Emperor Charles V banned Luther's writings and declared him a heretic and an enemy of the state and demanded Luther to recant…Luther is to say before the Diet that he no longer holds the opinion or the belief that he has proclaimed in all his writings. In other words, the Emperor along with Pope Leo wanted Luther to go back on his word. But instead, Luther *continues* in the Word of the Lord.

It was in this demand to recant that Luther continued in the Lord's Word by standing steadfast in God's Word and proclaimed his famous line, *Here I stand.* The Luther scholar Martin Brecht reports Luther's response when he was told to recant what he had proclaimed in his writings. Luther says it this way:

> Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scripture or by clear reason (for I do not trust either in the pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. I cannot do otherwise, here I stand, may God help me, Amen.[1]

Go along to get along or continue in God's Word? This is what Luther is confronted with in the process of this Diet. Nonetheless, the profound courage of Luther is stunning to me. Luther's word, centered and steadfast in the Lord's Word, continues, in that, Luther's word would not be hallowed or empty because he refused to go back on it. And to recant or go back on his own word would be like going back on the Lord's Word. By Luther's conscience he continues in the Lord's Word by standing on his own words that are undergirded and a continuation of the Lord's Word.

Nonetheless, an Edict was issued as a result of the Diet mandating that Luther be captured, turned over to the emperor, and punished as a notorious heretic. The Edict also declared that…those who help in Luther's capture will be rewarded generously for their good work. For some reason, this Edict was never enforced…Luther was never turned over to the emperor. Luther was able to stand

[1] Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: His Road to Reformation, 1483-1521*, Fortress Press: Minneapolis, 1985, pg. 460.

by his word because he was able to continue in God's Word and God's grace. Luther was able to stand steadfast because he knew and he trusted the Word of God according to St. Paul :

> …*(that)* we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, [2] through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. [3] And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, [4] and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, [5] and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. (Romans 5:1-5)

For the most part we might say our faith in God's Word is manifested in our actions but I am certain that our actions could never compare to Luther's especially if our very life was on the line as Luther's was in that Diet. However, Luther's intent was not to be earth shattering, Luther merely wanted to debate the issues he saw and witnessed in the church and his own faith in the Word that had been written on his heart. Luther simply wanted the truth of grace upon grace to be told about the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the truth of that Gospel to be carried out in the workings of the church at that time. As it turned out, this monk's powerful words of truth changed the course of history and here we stand in a Lutheran Church, but that did not make Luther happy at all.

Luther strongly opposed using his name to name a church. In response to rising social unrest, radical reforms, and student riots in Wittenberg Luther wrote in 1522, a treatise entitled, *A Sincere Admonition to All Christians to Guard Against Insurrection and Rebellion* in which Luther says this:

> In the first place, I ask that men make no reference to my name; let them call themselves Christians, not Lutherans. What is Luther? After all, the teaching is not mine. Neither was I crucified for anyone. St. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 3, would not allow the Christians to call themselves Pauline or Petrine (after Paul and Peter), but Christian. How then should I—poor stinking maggot-fodder that I am—come to have men call the children of Christ by my wretched name? Not so, my dear friends; let us abolish all party names and call ourselves Christians, after him whose teaching we hold.[2]

After Him whose teaching we hold in our hearts. Be it Lutherans or Christians, we continue in the Lord's word today as beggars, as Luther wrote on his death bed, as beggars with our hands out and that Word that is written in our hearts is before us in this piece of bread placed in our outstretched hands, and the blood that seals that covenant is placed on our lips with the wine that is given in this Holy Meal before us. In this Holy Meal, God gives us His Word…the assurance of life. This Holy Meal is a continuous reminder of God's continuous grace upon grace. Here in this Holy Meal, we are receiving God's Word of the forgiveness of sins, which contains and brings with it God's grace and Spirit with all his gifts, protection, defense, and power against death, the devil, and every trouble.[3] Here in this Holy Meal we continue, steadfast in God's word. Lord keep us steadfast in that Word always…

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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[2] https://wolfmueller.co/on-the-name-lutheran/

[3] Kolb, Robert ; Wengert, Timothy J. ; Arand, Charles P.: *The Book of Concord : The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. Minneapolis : Fortress Press, 2000. *The Large Catechism, the Sacrament of the Altar,* par. 70, page 474.