HAPPY 509TH BIRTHDAY PROTESTANT REFORMATION

We live in a time and place that draws sharp contrast between our culture and our faith. We who have accepted Jesus as our Savior and Lord have been left to live our lives in a sinful, fallen world.

John 17:13-19, Jesus says:
13 "I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. 14 I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. 15 My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. 16 They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. 17 Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. 18 As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. 19 For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.

Jesus says that whatever our culture is doing, we are not supposed to be led by it, but by Jesus. Jesus calls us to sanctified. Sanctified means to be set apart. In this passage Jesus calls His followers to be in the world, but not of the world, just as Jesus was in the world but not of the world.

This leads us to this weekend. Here in America, the National Retail Federation estimates shoppers will spend $4.1 BILLION on halloween candy. That's not all candy bought in November, that is candy marketed and bought for halloween. And if that much spending doesn't send you into a candy corn overload, it is a fraction of the record $13.5 BILION in overall halloween spending. And all of this spending comes during some tight economic conditions, when candy prices have risen 7. 7% over last year, and double the current rate of inflation. American shoppers have coped by making smaller purchases, but starting earlier to spread their spending over more trips, and eventually spending more in total. Are we deluded, irrational people that work to sabotage ourselves? It certainly appears so.

This passage makes clear that as Christ-followers, Jesus wants us to remain in the world. Verses 16-18 make clear our mission on earth is to be the same as Jesus' mission on earth. That mission is to redeem humanity from the penalty and power of sin and restore a broken relationship with their Creator. We are to be on

mission to seek and save the lost by sharing the love and sacrifice of Jesus, bridging the gap caused by sin. What better place to focus than on halloween.

Why do so many cultures observe Halloween?

For thousands of years, as long days of summer transitioned to shorter, cooler days in the fall, and once growing crops started dying, ancient cultures around the world looked for ways to make sense of what was happening to the world around them. They eventually concluded there was a cycle at work. There was a time of warming weather, initial rain, and plants started growing. That became a time of longer, warmer days and mature plants. Then came cooler, shorter days, dying plants, and finally the coldest, shortest days, when nothing grew, and many animals disappeared from view. These naturalistic observations led early cultures to associate what we call Spring with new life or rebirth, Summer with a time of plenty, Fall with final harvests and preparation for Winter. This Fall-Winter period came to be considered a time when these ancient cultures thought there was a thinning of the veil between the living and the spirit world. In Europe, the Celts flourished from 1200BC to 300AD, before mostly falling to Roman conquest. The Celts would have been the predecessor culture to all of the European cultures we know today. Across their entire area of influence, they observed a festival called Samhain (SOW-in or SAH-win). Samhain was the Celtic god of death, and his name literally means "summer's end'. These ancient festivals were strongly influenced by pre-Christian, pagan rituals. They included altars to ancestors, setting an extra place at the table to welcome the spirits of dead ancestors, a silent supper with a portion of food left for departed family and not speaking the names of the dead to keep the boundary between the living and spirit world intact, and cleansing rituals to start the winter with a protected environment. There were often bonfires, dressing in animal skins and going door-to-door reciting phrases to exchange for food, and harvest foods, such as beef stew and cooked turnips, prepared from the last culling for herds and crops before winter. The last stand of the Celts was in the furthest place the Romans tried to conquer, in northern England, in what we now call Scotland.

As Christianity spread across the world, the early church developed a strategy to eliminate the many deep-seated folk traditions it encountered in an attempt to change the local cultures and introduce Christianized replacements. The thinking was this would allow the different groups to gradually replace their thinking and practices with Church approved thinking and practices. Costumes originally worn

to protect people from evil spirits, changed to reenacting the lives of the saints during procession and church vigils. In the early 700s, Pope Gregory III established November 1 as All Saints Day, in conjunction with a chapel dedicated to all the saints in Saint Peter's basilica. In 835, Pope Gregory IV extended All Saints Day to all of the church, marking an official church holiday to replace other local observations like Samhain. As a fully sanctioned church observance, All Saints day came to be expanded to three days. In England these were called All Hallows Eve, October 31; All Saints Day, November 1; and All Soul's Day, November 2. All Soul's Day focused on praying for the deceased, especially those believed to be in purgatory.

This cultural tension between ancient folk tales and practices and church teaching has continues down through the ages, as evidenced by the migration of Halloween observations to America by Irish and Scottish migrants. Time and multi-cultural influences have continued to change Halloween practices into what we see today, a mostly benign family friendly event amplified by American commercialism.

And with that brief recap of how we got to Halloween in the first place, I want to tell you about one specific Halloween. It took place on October 31, 1517, in the college town of Wittenberg, Germany, when the local university priest posted a list of 95 grievances on his castle church door. He wrote them by hand in Latin, the official language of the church. His intention was to spark some scholarly debate over theological differences he had with the then current pope, Leo X, but it sparked a religious fire that changed the world forever and was a prime contributor to the creation of this country.

The Primary Grievance

The Pope needed money to finish the expansion of the Saint Peter's basilica in Rome, as well as to finance his indulgent personal lifestyle. To do this, Leo X has authorized the sale of papal indulgences. Pope Leo's emissaries offered to reduce the penalties for sin and time spent in purgatory in exchange for cash payment. A Dominican friar named Johann Tetzel, was traveling through Europe selling papal indulgences. He gained infamy for something that he said to persuade people to buy them. He encouraged people to think of their ancestors "clamoring for help" in purgatory, making potential buyers feel guilty if they did not seize the opportunity to contribute.

"As soon as the gold in the treasure chest rings, the rescued soul to heaven springs"

In addition to telling people that sins could be forgiven without confession by the dead, he is also reported to have said the indulgences would gain forgiveness for future sins. It was literally a 'Get out of Hell' card that required no confession or repentance, just payment.

Martin Luther thought these actions stood in stark contrast to what Scripture taught. As a priest and theologian in a college town, whose church met in the castle church in Wittenberg, Germany, Martin Luther posted his list of complaints as a scholarly, church exercise. Martin Luther hand wrote it in Latin, the language used by the Church, and intended to spark theological debate. He posted his list to the door of his church and mailed it the archbishop Albert of Mainz, asking the archbishop to stop the sale of indulgences in his region. Martin Luther had no idea that archbishop Albert had asked Pope Leo X to sell indulgences in his area of control, and that he and Pope Leo X would split the proceeds. It seems the archbishop also had debts to settle from buying his commission.

The problem Martin Luther had was that he had read and studied the bible. And Luther felt that what the church was doing was contrary to what the bible said. The 95 theses argued that the entire life of a believer should be characterized by repentance, asserting that this internal struggle with sin cannot be replaced by external acts of penance or purchased pardons. Luther emphasized that God alone holds the power of forgiveness and that the sale of indulgences distracted from the true grace found in the cross.

- **Necessity of Contrition** — Luther argued that any truly repentant Christian already possesses the right to full remission of penalty and guilt without the need for indulgence documents.
- **Criticism of Avarice** — He attacked the teaching that paying for souls to be released from purgatory or buying confessional privileges could replace the necessity of genuine repentance.
- **Misplaced Priorities** — The 95 theses questioned why the Pope, if he possessed the power to release souls from purgatory, would not do so out of holy love rather than for money intended for building churches.

- **The Power of the Gospel** — Luther maintained that the true treasures of the church are the Gospel of Christ and the grace of God, which far outweigh any benefits claimed by the sale of indulgences

Martin Luther did not start out planning to change the world, but technology that was just coming to flower in the early 1500s would play an integral part of what was to come.

What might have been a local church dustup without broad impact became the seminal event that would change the medieval world, forever. Unknown to Martin Luther, someone recopied his 95 theses, translated them from Latin to German, the local language, then had them printed and posted to other cities in the region. Long before the internet was invented, Martin Luther's 95 theses went viral across Europe.

The Technological Revolution of its Day

Johannes Gutenberg invented the moveable type printing press about 1450 in Strasbourg, Germany, about 400 miles from Wittenberg. The printing press revolutionized the speed and cost to print books. What had once taken artisans months and years to hand copy could be done in hours and days. Only the wealthy had been able to own manuscripts that could be purchased by the merchant class. Bibles that had only been available in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin were translated into locally spoken languages that people could read for themselves. By 1517, over 200 printing centers had been established in major European cities. These cities were producing 35,000 different works, representing 15-20 million books. When Martin Luther posted has 95 these, there were 43 editions of the Latin bible in Europe. 50 years later, in 1567, about 1.5 million copies of the bible were being printed, not in Latin, but in everyday languages. The Reformation was underway.

Consequences of the Protestant Reformation

The Protestant Reformation acted as a profound cultural and religious turning point that ended the unified authority of medieval Christianity and reshaped the trajectory of European society. By challenging established church structures and promoting individual interpretation of religious texts, the movement fundamentally altered educational, social, political, and spiritual life across the continent.

Education-By emphasizing direct access to Scripture, the Reformation inadvertently sparked a revolution in literacy and education that reached far beyond the church.

- **Literacy and Education**-Protestant reformers encouraged the reading of the Bible in local languages, leading to the establishment of public schools and higher literacy rates across Northern Europe.
- **Scientific Inquiry**-The habit of questioning religious dogma extended into medicine and astronomy, helping to cultivate the critical thinking necessary for the Scientific Revolution.

Social-The erosion of feudal structures empowered a rising middle class of merchants and bankers who found favor in the religious and social frameworks of Protestant cities.

Political-The Reformation decentralized power, moving it away from the papacy and toward secular rulers, which catalyzed the development of the modern nation-state. This redistribution of authority often came at a high cost, as the period was marked by extensive sectarian conflict and widespread displacement.

- **National Identity** — Rulers like Henry VIII rejected papal authority to establish national churches, such as the Anglican Church, which integrated religious practice into state governance.
- **Conflict and Sovereignty** — Decades of religious wars, including the devastating Thirty Years' War, ultimately led to the Peace of Westphalia, which allowed leaders to determine the religion of their own territories.
- **Democratic Foundations** — Thinkers such as John Locke promoted ideas regarding individual rights and conscience, providing intellectual precursors for later events like the American and French Revolutions.

Spiritual-The emphasis on individual conscience and the ability for common people to interpret truth for themselves laid groundwork for later concepts of democracy, human rights, and religious pluralism.

As the Protestant Reformation took root, a collection of five common themes emerged. Although never collected or referred to at the time, these five terms summarized the core convictions that emerged to distinguish reformer convictions from medieval church practice.

The Five Solas-

So called for the Latin term 'sola' meaning 'only' or 'alone', it wasn't until the 20th century they were collected and categorized.

SOLA SCRIPTURA meaning 'Scripture alone' maintains that the Bible is the inspired Word of God and serves as the only inerrant and final authority for the church's faith and practice.

Key verses

I have applied all these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brothers, that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another. (1 Corinthians 4:6)

No prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (2 Peter 1:20–21)

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16–17)

SOLA FIDE meaning 'Faith alone' affirms that justification, or being made right with God, occurs only through faith in Jesus rather than through human works or merit.

Key verses

And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness, just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works. (Romans 4:5–6)

Yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified. (Galatians 2:16)

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Ephesians 2:8–9)

SOLA GRATIA meaning ‘Grace alone’ declares that salvation is entirely a work of God's grace from beginning to end, meaning it cannot be earned by human effort.

Key verses

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Ephesians 2:1–10)

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ. (Titus 2:11–13)

And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. (Acts 20:32)

SOLA CHRISTUS meaning ‘Christ alone’ asserts that Christ is the exclusive basis for justification and the only mediator between God and humanity.

Key verses

He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit. (Titus 3:5)

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. (Romans 3:21–22)

And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. (Colossians 1:18)

SOLI DEO GLORIA meaning ‘Glory to God alone’ emphasizes that the purpose of creation, salvation, and all of life is the glory of God alone, rather than human achievement or satisfaction.

Key verses

So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. (1 Corinthians 10:31)

We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. (Romans 6:4)

Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:9–11)

These principles helped recover what the Reformers viewed as the core gospel message that had been obscured within the medieval church. The Protestant Reformation is the beginning of all not-Catholic churches in existence today. As a Baptist church, we can trace our faith's founding to about 1609 in Amsterdam, Holland. This church was led by an Englishman-in-exile, Thomas Helwys. Helwys believed and preached Scripture taught baptism only for believing adults, and separation of church and state to allow for freedom of religions conscience. In 1613 Helwys and twelve other Baptists returned to England and founded the first Baptist congregation in east London, England. They delivered a copy of one of Helwys' books to English King James, with a handwritten inscription arguing for liberty of conscience. "The King", Helwys wrote, "is a mortal man, and not God, therefore he hath no power over the mortal soul of his subjects to make laws and ordinances for them and to set spiritual Lords over them." This was in contradiction to the practices and standings of the Anglican Church, the official church of England, of which King James I was the religious head. King James had Helwys and other Baptists thrown into Newgate Prison, where Helwys died in 1616. He was 40 years old. I trust you can see Helwys' biblical principle of religious freedom making its way into the pilgrim drive to start free in a new world, thinking which would also be incorporated into our constitution.

Pastor John starts our worship services asking who brought their bibles with them. He emphasizes the need for believers to read the Scriptures for themselves, not just to take the pastor's word for what it says. What he does every time we worship is to honor the five hundred year history of the reformation, and the efforts of godly believers who preached and sacrificed over hundreds and hundreds of years to urge Christians to read the bible for themselves and pray about what it said to them, and to act as led by the Spirit of God.

So as you decide what you are going to do this halloween, let me encourage you to consider finding a way to honor those giants of the faith that set examples for us. Read the bible every day. Participate in a bible-based study. Reacquaint yourselves and your children with the Christian roots of the celebration, and encourage your children to emulate some real heroes of the faith, not in what they put on, but in how they live their lives.

Five Key Passages for Reformation Day—As you prepare for Reformation Day on 10/31 reflect on these key passages that inspired the early reformers. Discuss in your group if these provide inspiration to your personal discipleship practices.

Romans 1:17
17 For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

Ephesians 2:8
8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God

1 Peter 2:5
5 you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

2 Timothy 3:16
16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,

Matthew 11:29-30
29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. **30** For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."