



Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Thy Word

The 500th Anniversary of Luther's 1522 Return to Wittenberg

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*Lord, keep us steadfast in Thy Word.
Curb those who fain by craft and sword
Would wrest the Kingdom from Thy Son,
And set at naught all He hath done.*
– Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary, #589.

Acknowledgments

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1 The “Black Bear”

2 What a thunderstorm!¹ That’s all Johannes could think. He and Marcus,² his traveling companion, were
3 both drenched to the bone. The late winter-early spring storm had come upon them suddenly and
4 fiercely while they were on the road. Now that they had arrived at the city of Jena, Johannes and Marcus
5 were looking for a place to dry out.

6 “Typical,” Marcus spoke up as they walked. “During the storm there was no shelter to be had at all,” he
7 said, “but the minute we get to town, sure enough, the rain stops.”

8 Johannes smiled in agreement. Looking up, he noticed the clouds didn’t look nearly as threatening now
9 as they had an hour earlier, and the torrential rainfall they’d been making their way through had slowed
10 to a gentle sprinkle. “We should have planned a little better,” Johannes finally answered. “At this time of
11 the year the weather can turn in a moment.”

12 Johannes and Marcus were a long way from Saint Gall, Switzerland, where they were students at the
13 university. The city of Jena would provide just the opportunity they needed for some much-needed rest.
14 Johannes and Marcus shared a look when they saw the name on the sign outside the local tavern and
15 inn: “Der Schwarze Bär” —“The Black Bear.” Marcus grinned as he shook his head. “A ridiculous name,”
16 he said.

17 “Perhaps,” Johannes said, “but at least we can get out of the wet!”

18 The two of them entered the Black Bear and immediately collapsed onto the bench by the door. As they
19 began to relax, Johannes and Marcus began chatting about their journey, where they were going from
20 here, and so on, when all of a sudden they heard a voice: “Don’t just sit there in the entryway! Come
21 and sit down!”

22 They turned and saw that the voice had come from a dark-haired knight seated at a table in the back of
23 the room. At least he was dressed as a knight. He wore the baggy breeches and doublet of a knight,
24 along with a red beret on his head, a knight’s sword at his side, his hand resting on the hilt. But there
25 was something different about this man, something wasn’t quite... knightly. Maybe it was the small book
26 that was open in front of him. In all his life Johannes had never met a knight who could read.

27 The man’s bearded face smiled as he gestured at the empty seats at his table, inviting them once more
28 to sit down. When they took their seats, the man introduced himself. “You can call me Jörg,” he said.

29 “I am Johannes Kessler,” Johannes replied, “and this is my friend, Marcus.”

30 “Pleased to meet you,” said the knight. “The two of you are Swiss, are you not?”

31 “Why yes, we are, sir,” Johannes said.

32 “I’ve met some of your countrymen before,” the knight said. “You must be thirsty! Let me get you
33 something to drink.” Before they could protest, the knight had already called the host over and ordered

¹ What follows is a fictionalized account of a chance meeting that took place in the early days of March, 1522 between two students and a mysterious “knight” at the “Black Bear”, a tavern and inn in the city of Jena.

² A made up name for Johannes’ traveling companion, whose name the major Luther biographies do not disclose.

34 a beer for himself, and some wine for his new Swiss friends. "So, where in Switzerland are you from?" he
35 asked.

36 Johannes answered, "We are students from the university at Saint Gall, in Basel."

37 "Basel!" the knight exclaimed. The host returned to the table with the ordered beverages. As he turned
38 to head back to the counter, the knight asked, "So, what brings you all the way to Jena?"

39 Johannes excitedly said, "We are headed to Wittenberg, to visit the university. We've heard so much
40 about Luther and Melancthon, and all the reforms in the Wittenberg church, that we wanted to see
41 and hear for ourselves. We know that Luther's been in hiding these past several months, but with all the
42 recent news coming out of Wittenberg, we hope for the opportunity to see him. By any chance, sir, do
43 you know if Luther has returned to Wittenberg?"

44 "It won't be long until Martin Luther is again in Wittenberg. In fact, he is expected soon," Jörg said with
45 a coy little smile. Changing the subject ever so slightly, the knight asked, "So, what are they saying about
46 Luther in Switzerland these days?"

47 "Well, sir," Johannes said, "Some laud him to the skies as a great reformer."

48 "Others," Marcus chimed in, "especially the priests, denounce him as an intolerable heretic."³

49 At Marcus's words, the knight warmly chuckled to himself. They three of them spent the afternoon in
50 conversation. Later two merchants came to the Black Bear and joined the knight and the students. There
51 was much to talk about. Eventually, the host brought supper for the men. At the end of the evening,
52 when they were about to leave, the two students went to pay the host for their drinks and their dinner.
53 The host waved them off and told them it was taken care of, gesturing toward the knight. That strange
54 knight had paid their bill! Before they turned to leave, Johannes heard the knight call to them once
55 more. "When you arrive in Wittenberg," Jörg said, "greet Jerome Schurf, the lawyer. He is your
56 compatriot from Saint Gall, and will be most pleased to meet you. But when you see him, greet him also
57 for me. And when he asks you who I am, simply call me, 'the one who is to come.'"

58 As they headed back out onto the road, Johannes and Marcus shared a look. "The one who is to come,"
59 Marcus moaned, waving his hands mysteriously.

60 Johannes answered, "What a strange knight!" And he meant it in the kindest possible way.

61 ***

62 Strange as this knight was, Johannes Kessler and his traveling companion followed his instructions, and
63 in doing so, they had the surprise of their lives. Upon their arrival in Wittenberg a few days later, on
64 Saturday, March 8 of 1522, the students came to the home of attorney Jerome Schurf to present him
65 with their greetings and letters of recommendation from Saint Gall. Yet when Schurf invited them in,
66 they were greeted by that strange knight from the Black Bear in Jena! Only now his beard was gone, and

³ Schaff, Philip. 1910. *History of the Christian Church*. Second Edition, Revised. Vol. VII. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing House. 385-386.

67 instead of the clothing of a knight, he wore the robes of an Augustinian monk! The knight's name was
68 different too: no longer Junker Jörg, but Martin Luther!⁴

69 It must have been quite the surprise for the young Johannes Kessler. Even more surprising, perhaps, was
70 the pace at which Luther was traveling. In fact, Luther had already arrived in Wittenberg the previous
71 Thursday, days ahead of the two Swiss students with whom he had dined in Jena. Departing from the
72 Wartburg castle on February 28, Luther made the roughly 200 kilometer journey to Wittenberg on
73 horseback, arriving on the evening of Thursday, March 6. Though he had not set any land-speed records,
74 Dr. Luther had obviously ridden like a man on a mission.

75 One might also regard Luther's return to public life as a surprise. "Kidnapped" by elector Frederick's men
76 on May 4, 1521, Luther had managed to avoid drawing attention to himself, at least outside of his
77 writings. During the intervening months at the Wartburg, he had adopted the new identity of Junker
78 Jörg, letting his tonsure (the "hair-do" of a monk) grow out and his beard grow in. To reveal himself now
79 was risky. Since the Edict of Worms went into effect on May 25, 1521, Luther was a wanted man, an
80 outlaw subject to arrest if discovered. The road from the Wartburg to Wittenberg passed through the
81 heart of Ducal Saxony, the territory of Duke George, who would have gladly done the Holy Roman
82 Emperor, Charles V, the favor of removing Martin Luther from circulation.

83 So, what drove Luther to leave the relative safety and security of the Wartburg to risk coming back to
84 Wittenberg? In a word, it was love: love for the people of Wittenberg, who Luther regarded as his flock;
85 love for souls for whom Christ died. The congregation there was in trouble. From Luther's point of view,
86 the wolf was in the sheep pen.⁵ Radical reformers had stirred up the townspeople in the name of
87 furthering the Reformation, leading to civil unrest. The Augustinian monastery was in upheaval, the
88 university at Wittenberg was losing students left and right, and the entire town was on edge. Luther
89 needed to return so he could set things right. In his love for his parishioners, Luther could not stand by
90 and let his flock be torn apart, even at the great risk of harm to himself.

91 Yet perhaps most surprisingly of all was the manner in which Luther chose to lovingly rescue his flock:
92 not with the force of law, nor with harsh demands, but with the Word of God. In the short term Luther
93 would preach the Word to lead his flock to repentance and faith, and in the longer term Luther hoped to
94 put the Scriptures themselves directly into the hands of the people.

95 This year marks the 500th anniversary of Luther's return to Wittenberg and the events that followed.
96 True, much has transpired between 1522 and 2022. However, one can still see many parallels between
97 Luther's day and the present age. The Reformation brought about a time of swift changes and social
98 upheaval not unlike the change and upheaval that we have experienced within our own lifetimes, even
99 of recent years. From the Reformer and his times we can gain an appreciation for how the Lord keeps us
100 steadfast in the true faith by calling us to repentance when we stray and comforting us with the
101 promises of the gospel, and that He also preserves the truth of His Word among us.

⁴ Brecht, Martin. 1990. *Martin Luther: Shaping and Defining the Reformation, 1521-1532*. Translated by James L. Schaaf. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress. 42-43.

⁵ Brecht, 57.

102 Part 1: Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word—Steadfast in True Faith

103 Carrying on with the Reformation in Luther's absence

104 Luther did not much care for the idea of going into hiding at the Wartburg. He understood it was for the
 105 best, but he regretted not being on the front lines anymore. In a May 12, 1521 letter to his friend and
 106 coworker Philip Melanchthon, Luther expressed that he wanted nothing more than to meet the fury of
 107 his enemies head on.⁶ He understood that the university as well as the congregation in Wittenberg
 108 would face serious challenges in the coming months. The Reformation Luther had begun would have to
 109 proceed without him. So, in that same letter, he sought to build Melanchthon up as a leader in his
 110 absence. Luther writes, "You, therefore, as minister of the Word, be steadfast in the meantime and
 111 fortify the walls and towers of Jerusalem until [the enemy] also attack you. You know your call and your
 112 gifts. I pray for you as for no one else, if my prayer can accomplish something—which I do not doubt."⁷

113 Melanchthon did his best to fill that leadership role. Thankfully, the Lord aided Melanchthon by
 114 providing fresh faces on the university faculty and in the local congregation. Justus Jonas, a lawyer from
 115 Erfurt, had taken a teaching position on the legal faculty, only to soon exchange it for a position in the
 116 theology department. Aurogallus arrived to teach Hebrew. Johann Bugenhagen also arrived earlier in
 117 the same year.⁸ In addition to others like John Agricola, Nicholas von Amsdorf and local leaders like
 118 artist and mayor Lukas Cranach, these men served the cause of the Reformation faithfully.

119 Yet Melanchthon's ability and opportunity to lead had its limits. A gifted theologian, Philip Melanchthon
 120 in September of 1521 published his *Loci Communes*, the first Lutheran systematic theology, organizing
 121 the doctrines of the Christian faith around the central article of justification by grace through faith in
 122 Christ.⁹ Still, Melanchthon had a somewhat timid soul and was not fond of confrontations. In a July letter
 123 from the Wartburg that year, Luther chides his friend Philip, saying that he is "just too gentle."¹⁰ Luther
 124 also had hoped that Philip could take Luther's place in the local pulpit in Wittenberg, but since
 125 Melanchthon was not ordained (and married, to boot), the All Saints Foundation (the group responsible
 126 for making sure the city church had a preacher) refused to grant him a call to preach. In the end,
 127 Melanchthon saw his sphere of influence confined to the university lecture hall.

128 Instead, the duty of replacing Luther in the pulpit fell to two men: Gabriel Zwilling and Andreas
 129 Karlstadt; Zwilling at the Augustinian monastery, and Karlstadt at the city church. So, who were these
 130 men? According to one of Luther's colleagues from the local Augustinian cloister, Zwilling was a
 131 powerful preacher, passionate in his presentation of the Word of God.¹¹ (Zwilling definitely had a unique
 132 appearance. Luther biographer Heinrich Bornkamm refers to Zwilling as "the little one-eyed

⁶ Luther, Martin. 1963. *Luther's Works, Volume 48: Letters I*. Edited by Gottfried G. Krodel and Helmut T. Lehmann. Translated by Gottfried G. Krodel. Vol. 48. Philadelphia: Fortress Press. (LW 48:215).

⁷ LW 48:216.

⁸ Jacobs, Henry Eyster. 1910. *Martin Luther: The Hero of the Reformation, 1483-1546*. New York: The General Council Publication House, via G. P. Putnam's Sons, The Knickerbocker Press. 204.

⁹ LW 48:298.

¹⁰ LW 48:257.

¹¹ Bornkamm, Heinrich. 1983. *Luther in Mid-Career, 1521-1530*. Edited by Karin Bornkamm. Translated by E. Theodore Bachmann. Philadelphia: Fortress Press. 24.

133 Augustinian.”¹²) Andreas Karlstadt, a few years Luther’s senior as a professor of theology, was also
 134 capable in the pulpit. Yet Karlstadt tended to have an erratic personality. Karlstadt had accompanied
 135 Luther to Leipzig in July of 1519 to debate the substance of the Ninety-Five Theses. Yet when it came
 136 time to debate, Karlstadt came off as disorganized and unprepared. Historian Philip Schaff in his history
 137 of the Reformation summarized Karlstadt as “a man of considerable originality, learning, eloquence, zeal
 138 and courage, but eccentric, radical, injudicious, ill-balanced, restless, and ambitious for leadership.”¹³

139 Through the Wittenberg pulpit, Zwilling and Karlstadt influenced the townspeople as well as their
 140 fellows in the university and the local Augustinian cloister. Eventually, the preaching of Karlstadt and
 141 Zwilling would put them at the heart of the controversy necessitating Luther’s return.

142 Change leads to problems in Wittenberg

143 Big problems often start off small. Such was the case in Wittenberg as the reform-minded believers
 144 there began to implement changes based on Luther’s writings. In Luther’s absence Karlstadt began to
 145 see himself as the leader of the “Wittenberg Movement.”¹⁴ So, on June 21, 1521, Karlstadt took the lead
 146 in proposing a disputation, an academic debate, over vows of celibacy, and published a set of theses
 147 dealing with the topic. The time was right for such a debate since already by this time some priests were
 148 choosing to break their vow of celibacy and marry. In his theses, however, Karlstadt claimed on the basis
 149 of 1 Timothy 3:2 (“It is necessary, then, for the overseer to be above reproach, the husband of only one
 150 wife...”)¹⁵ that every priest should be married. Furthermore, according to 1 Timothy 5:9 (“Let a widow be
 151 put on the list if she is over sixty years old, has been a wife of one husband...”), he argued that the
 152 monastic vow of celibacy was not binding before age sixty.¹⁶

153 Luther generally approved of Karlstadt’s diligence in the matter, but was not happy with Karlstadt’s
 154 exegesis. In his August 3 letter to Philip Melanchthon, Luther picked apart some of the weaknesses of
 155 Karlstadt’s position. With regard to 1 Timothy 5:9, Luther rightly pointed out that the passage has
 156 nothing to do with regulating celibacy in the church.¹⁷ Nor did Luther see in 1 Timothy 3 a requirement
 157 that all priests be married. “They will not push a wife on me!” Luther exclaimed with his trademark wit.¹⁸
 158 In the end Luther’s solution to whether or not monastic vows or vows of celibacy in the priesthood
 159 ought to be kept rested on the doctrine of justification by faith in Christ alone. In Christian freedom,
 160 anyone can make a vow to serve the Lord, provided that the person understands that there is no
 161 righteousness to be gained by it. If someone takes a vow with the intention of seeking righteousness or
 162 salvation by it, the vow must be annulled. Since no one can really know what was in another person’s
 163 heart when they took their vows, however, the decision to abandon a vow must be left to the

¹² Bornkamm, 24.

¹³ Schaff, 378.

¹⁴ Buelow, Timothy H. 2018. "Luther's Invocavit Sermons: The Wittenberg Professor's Pastoral Perspective in Preaching." *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* (Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary) 58 (4): 327-355. 327.

¹⁵ 2019. *Holy Bible, Evangelical Heritage Version*. Milwaukee: Wartburg Project, Inc., Northwestern Publishing House. All Scripture references, unless otherwise noted, are taken from the *Holy Bible, Evangelical Heritage Version* (EHV).

¹⁶ E. G. Schweibert, Ph. D. 1950. *Luther and His Times: The Reformation from a New Perspective*. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House. 524.

¹⁷ LW 48:283-284.

¹⁸ LW 48:290.

164 individual's conscience.¹⁹ In early October Luther published two sets of theses, which formed the basis
165 for Luther's famous study *On Monastic Vows*, published November 21, 1521.

166 Luther's theses caused quite the stir, superseding the writings of others on the subject, including
167 Karlstadt's. Gabriel Zwilling began actively criticizing monasticism and encouraging others to leave the
168 monastery. Brecht writes, "On 12 November, thirteen Augustinian hermits took that step."²⁰ The debate
169 over monastic vows also highlighted the difference in approach between Luther and Karlstadt. A sincere
170 man, much of Karlstadt's preaching and teaching was in accord with Luther. Yet he sometimes stretched
171 the meaning of Bible passages to include things that were never intended. He tended toward legalism,
172 replacing old rules (such as celibacy and monastic vows) with new rules (requiring all priests to marry),
173 violating the principles of Christian freedom and charity.²¹ Luther, on the other hand, took a more
174 deliberative tack. Luther believed that one's doctrine and life needed to be based on clear, unambiguous
175 passages of Scripture. In matters where the Word of God is silent, the faithful may be left to follow their
176 conscience, so that fruits of faith may flow freely.

177 While the debate over celibacy and vows mattered to priests, monks, and nuns, it did not directly impact
178 the life of the average Christian. The Catholic mass however, was a different story. The mass, and
179 especially the celebration of the Lord's Supper, was the central element of church life, touching the life
180 of every believer.²² For this reason, the mass became "the second big issue in Wittenberg among the
181 proponents of church renewal."²³

182 In mid-July the subject of the mass came up in some theses Karlstadt had prepared for a baccalaureate
183 disputation. In those theses, he stated that receiving only bread in communion was a sin. While Luther
184 agreed that the time had come to put an end to withholding the cup from the laity, he believed it went
185 too far to say that those who receive communion in only "one kind" commit sin. In his August 1 letter to
186 Melanchthon, Luther points out that pious believers who receive only the bread at the Lord's altar do so
187 without their consent.²⁴ The average parishioners receiving communion in one kind are not sinning
188 because they are the victims, not the perpetrators.

189 By the end of September, the city of Wittenberg saw the first changes in the practice of the mass. On
190 the Feast of St. Michael, September 29, Melanchthon and some of his students participated in a private
191 mass at his home where communicants received both the chalice as well as the bread. On October 6,
192 Gabriel Zwilling began preaching against the celebration of private masses without communicants, and
193 against the veneration of the consecrated host. Soon after, the Augustinian monastery began to
194 celebrate the mass with the distribution of both earthly elements. When the prior of the monastery
195 forbade this practice, the monastery stopped celebrating the sacrament entirely. Elector Frederick the
196 Wise formed a committee of university professors including Jonas, Karlstadt, attorney Jerome Schurf,
197 and Melanchthon to negotiate with the Augustinians so that they would not introduce startling changes
198 to the mass. On October 17, Karlstadt held another public disputation. The committee agreed on the
199 need for administering both the bread and the cup in the Supper and that the canon of the mass (the

¹⁹ LW 48:299, 301.

²⁰ Brecht, 23.

²¹ Schaff, 379.

²² Brecht, 25.

²³ Bornkamm, 23.

²⁴ LW 48:280.

200 language that made the mass into a re-sacrifice of Christ's body and blood) be abolished along with
 201 private masses, and on October 20 they reported their findings to the elector. At this time the elector,
 202 however, for financial and political reasons, rejected any changes to the mass in Wittenberg.²⁵

203 In November tensions began to arise. From that time on the committee of professors and the monastery
 204 found it difficult to reach a decision. The elector continued to field complaints from the Catholic canons
 205 and the Augustinian prior about the innovators (those who brought changes to the mass), those who
 206 were leaving the monastery, and Zwilling's fire and brimstone preaching.²⁶ By November 30 even
 207 Zwilling had discarded his monk's cowl and left Wittenberg to preach elsewhere.²⁷ Luther himself
 208 weighed in on the dispute with his lengthy treatise, *The Misuse of the Mass*, though it would not appear
 209 in print until January of 1522.

210 On December 4, hearing reports about some of the rebellious activities going on, Luther made a secret
 211 visit to Wittenberg to see the situation for himself. Traveling as Junker Jörg, he stayed at the home of
 212 Philip Melancthon for six days. After his return to the Wartburg, Luther wrote *A Sincere Admonition...*
 213 *to All Christians to Guard Against Insurrection and Rebellion*, in which he expressly acknowledged the
 214 institution of government and reminded his readers that God would accomplish his judgment without
 215 insurrection or the work of human hands.²⁸

216 Luther felt the need to write because, even though his general evaluation about events in Wittenberg
 217 was positive, he could see that civil unrest was beginning to brew. On December 3 students armed with
 218 knives under their coats disrupted the mass in the city church, drove the priests from the altar, and took
 219 away the missals. When the rector of the university and the city council wanted to punish those
 220 responsible, they were met with opposition from a large group of citizens with a list of demands: all
 221 masses were to be abolished, the Lord's Supper was to be given in both kinds to anyone who asked for
 222 it, close the taverns and brothels, and do not punish the students who disrupted the mass. My mid-
 223 December the elector asserted his authority once more in handling the perpetrators of the student
 224 uprising, and on December 19 reiterated the decision that forbade any changes to the mass.²⁹

225 The December 19 announcement by the elector moved Karlstadt to act. On Christmas Day 1521,
 226 Karlstadt celebrated the mass without wearing the traditional vestments, conducted the liturgy in
 227 German, and at the Supper distributed both the bread and the wine to Christmas worshipers.³⁰ In
 228 addition, Karlstadt placed the bread and the chalice into the hand of each communicant.³¹ Some saw the
 229 change as a sign of freedom; to others it was sacrilege. The mood turned dangerous. Mobs disturbed the
 230 worship at every congregation during the Christmas midnight mass.³²

231 Two days after Christmas, more trouble arrived. Three men claiming special revelations from God came
 232 to Wittenberg from Zwickau in the south: Nicholas Storch, Thomas Drechsel, and Melancthon's former
 233 student Marcus Thomae (also known as Marcus Stübner). Quickly given the catchy nickname, "The

²⁵ Brecht, 26-27.

²⁶ Brecht, 27.

²⁷ Bornkamm, 37.

²⁸ Brecht, 27, 29, 31.

²⁹ Brecht, 30-31.

³⁰ Kittelson, 179.

³¹ Bornkamm, 51.

³² Bornkamm, 52.

234 Zwickau Prophets,” they stirred up the crowds with apocalyptic tales of events to come, while at the
 235 same time denying the efficacy of infant baptism. In Bornkamm’s biography of Luther, he summarizes
 236 some of the “prophesying” of Marcus Thomae and Nicholas Storch in particular:

237 Soon, [Thomae] claimed, the Turks would be coming and kill all the priests, including those who
 238 had married. And, he went on, after a revolution in five or seven years the devout people would
 239 still be alive and one faith and one baptism would be supreme... [Storch] was a fantastic
 240 agitator, skilled in capturing people’s attention with ever more amazing tales about himself. One
 241 of them told that the angel Gabriel had appeared to him and promised that Storch would sit on
 242 Gabriel’s throne.³³

243 From that point things quickly slid from bad to worse. On New Year’s Day, Zwilling introduced a new
 244 form of worship at the Castle Church in which leading local officials participated. Suddenly, prior
 245 confession was no longer required to receive the Lord’s Supper. A few days after the Augustinian
 246 chapter in January, under Zwilling’s influence, people rushed the sanctuary of the monastery to burn the
 247 paintings and destroy the side altars in the church.³⁴

248 Karlstadt himself married the daughter of a poor nobleman on January 19, 1522. Seeing himself as the
 249 leader of a burgeoning social movement, he began to make pronouncements on all manner of things:

250 He denounced pictures and images as dumb idols... He assailed the fasts, and enjoined the
 251 people to eat meat and eggs on fast-days. He repudiated all titles and dignities... He cast away
 252 his priestly and academic robes, put on a plain citizen’s dress, afterwards a peasant’s coat, and
 253 had himself called brother Andrew.³⁵

254 On January 25, to prevent things from getting further out of hand, the city council passed an inclusive
 255 ordinance governing both church and civil society in Wittenberg. The ordinance, based partially on
 256 Luther’s ideas but written mostly under Karlstadt’s influence, attempted to combat poverty and
 257 immorality and provide the city church with a new order of worship. In essence the order codified much
 258 of Karlstadt’s legalism, especially with regard to the order of service and the prohibition on images in
 259 the churches. In light of the new ordinance, and spurred on by the preaching of Karlstadt and Zwilling,
 260 the townspeople took it upon themselves to break into the churches and destroy a number of the
 261 pictures.³⁶

262 In the danger and confusion of the time, students began to flee from the university. They could no
 263 longer support themselves since the new ordinance had outlawed begging. Besides, what purpose was
 264 there for higher education, especially since Karlstadt and Zwilling were taking it upon themselves to ask
 265 simple townspeople—to their own astonishment—what certain Bible passages meant?³⁷

³³ Bornkamm, 60.

³⁴ Bornkamm, 59-60.

³⁵ Schaff, 379-380.

³⁶ Bornkamm, 60-61.

³⁷ Bornkamm, 62.

266 Luther's Return – Back in Black

267 By mid-February the city fathers in Wittenberg were more than ready for Luther to return, and told him
 268 so.³⁸ The elector had again stepped in and removed Karlstadt and Zwilling from their preaching positions
 269 and installing Luther's friend Nicholas Amsdorf as the preacher at the City Church. He also annulled the
 270 ordinance passed by the city council. Yet tensions continued to run high, so much so that Melanchthon
 271 even considered leaving the university. Around February 22, Martin Luther sent a letter off to Frederick
 272 the Wise, announcing his intention to leave the Wartburg and return to Wittenberg. In the letter, Luther
 273 alludes to Frederick's collection of Christian relics that he had acquired over the years, and declares that
 274 God is now sending him a new relic: "a whole cross, together with nails, spears, and scourges."³⁹ Luther
 275 entreats his elector to not be afraid of this cross, and to stretch out his arms and let the nails go deep.
 276 For the cross that Frederick was about to receive was the cross of having to deal with Luther's return to
 277 public life.

278 The elector sent the Eisenach bailiff to try to dissuade Luther from leaving. The bailiff met with Luther
 279 the evening of February 28. Luther departed the next day. Luther made most of the trip unaccompanied,
 280 stopping at the Black Bear Inn in Jena along the way. Only for the final stage, through the territory of
 281 Duke George (who was hostile to the Reformation), did Luther welcome the company of a few knights
 282 for protection.⁴⁰

283 Luther arrived in Wittenberg on the evening of Thursday, March 6. His first order of business upon
 284 returning was to write another letter to the elector. The elector had to deal with the political blowback
 285 that was sure to come from Luther's return. So, he had contacted attorney Jerome Schurf to have Luther
 286 write a letter which could be sent to the Imperial Council of Regency, "stating the reasons that he had
 287 returned against the elector's wishes and giving his assurance that he had no desire to cause trouble for
 288 anyone."⁴¹ The letter had to be carefully crafted to state in no uncertain terms that the elector had
 289 nothing to do with Luther's return. With some help, Luther's letter was so persuasive that even the
 290 elector's cousin, Duke George believed it.⁴²

291 On the first Sunday in Lent, March 9, 1522, Martin Luther returned to the pulpit of the City Church. No
 292 longer wearing the doublet of a knight, a clean-shaven Luther appeared before the parish "back in the
 293 black cowl of an Augustinian monk."⁴³ Beginning Sunday Luther preached a series of eight sermons
 294 throughout the following week in an effort to call his erring flock to repentance and set their hearts
 295 once more on the grace of Christ. These sermons would eventually become known as the "Invocavit
 296 Sermons."

³⁸ Kittelson, 180.

³⁹ *LW 48:387*.

⁴⁰ Brecht, 42-43.

⁴¹ Brecht, 44.

⁴² Kittelson, 182.

⁴³ Kittelson, 182.

297 The "Invocavit Sermons"

298 Right away at the beginning of his first sermon, Luther aims for the heart of the matter: being able to
 299 stand before God, which is impossible for us apart from Christ and His saving work.⁴⁴ Here is how Luther
 300 starts:

301 The summons of death comes to us all, and no one can die for another. Every one must fight his
 302 own battle with death by himself, alone. We can shout into another's ears, but every one must
 303 himself be prepared for the time of death, for I will not be with you then, nor you with me.
 304 Therefore every one must himself know and be armed with the chief things which concern a
 305 Christian.⁴⁵

306 In all of their arguing back and forth over external issues, the people of Wittenberg had forgotten the
 307 whole point of the religious exercise. Luther had come back to remind them. He goes on to restate those
 308 "chief things that concern a Christian." First comes the law: "In the first place, we must know that we
 309 are children of wrath, and all our works, intentions, and thoughts are nothing at all."⁴⁶ Next comes the
 310 gospel: "Secondly, that God has sent us his only-begotten Son that we may believe in him and that
 311 whoever trusts in him shall be free from sin and a child of God."⁴⁷

312 In reference to the Gospel Lesson for Invocavit Sunday, Satan's temptation of Christ in the wilderness,
 313 Luther makes the point that when it comes to these two chief teachings of law and gospel, "Here we
 314 should all be well versed in the Bible and ready to confront the devil with many passages."⁴⁸ This was
 315 one of the problems that Luther had seen from afar for several months. Karlstadt and Zwilling had so
 316 convoluted the Scriptures and confused people by basing doctrines on weak passages of Scripture and
 317 focusing on external rules that people were beginning to forget God's grace in Christ.

318 Next, Luther addresses love: "Thirdly, we must also have love and through love we must do to one
 319 another as God has done to us through faith." He quotes Paul's eloquent words from 1 Corinthians 13
 320 before going on to rebuke his flock:

321 "If I had the tongues of angels and could speak of the highest things in faith, and have not love, I
 322 am nothing. And here, dear friends, have you not grievously failed? I see no signs of love among
 323 you... God does not want hearers and repeaters of words [Jas 1:22], but followers and doers,
 324 and this occurs in faith through love."⁴⁹

325 Faith and love also leads to the fruit of patience:

⁴⁴ Buelow, 331.

⁴⁵ Luther, Martin. 1959. "Eight Sermons at Wittenberg, 1522." In *Luther's Works, Volume 51: Sermons I*, edited by John W. Doberstein and Helmut T. Lehmann, translated by John W. Doberstein, 69-100. Philadelphia: Fortress Press. *LW 51:70*.

⁴⁶ *LW 51:70*.

⁴⁷ *LW 51:71*.

⁴⁸ *LW 51:71*.

⁴⁹ *LW 51:71*.

326 “Fourthly, we also need patience. For whoever has faith, trusts in God, and shows love to his
327 neighbor, practicing it day by day, must needs suffer persecution... But patience works and
328 produces hope [Rom. 5:4], which freely yields itself to God and vanishes away in him.”⁵⁰

329 The Rev. Timothy Buelow, in his 2017 ELS General Pastoral Conference paper on the “Invocavit
330 Sermons,” draws our attention to Luther’s call for patience here: “This is a key word and theme for
331 Luther at this stage in the Reformation. Later, Luther will be less patient... But for now, Luther wants
332 patience with the weak to be the rule of the day and no force to be used in bringing about the Gospel’s
333 reign.”⁵¹ For Luther patience means that “one must not insist upon his rights, but must see what may be
334 useful and helpful to his brother.” Luther then illustrates the kind of patience he seeks with the picture
335 of a mother weaning her child. She does not immediately start her child on a diet of solid food, but
336 slowly transitions her child through various soft foods first. In the same way God’s people need to slowly
337 bring others along, beginning with the milk of the gospel until they are strong enough in the faith, “and
338 thus we do not travel heavenward alone, but bring our brethren, who are not now our friends, with us.”
339 In a rather pointed way Luther offers this assessment: “I would not have gone so far as you have done, if
340 I had been here. The cause is good, but there has been too much haste. For there are still brothers and
341 sisters on the other side who belong to us and must still be won.”⁵² Patience and love requires looking to
342 the needs of the other first, so that those who are weak in faith and yet attempt to follow the strong
343 may not be destroyed by the devil on their deathbed.

344 Towards the end of the first sermon, Luther calls his hearers’ attention to the important distinction
345 between “must” and “free.” “The ‘must’ is that which necessity requires, and which must ever be
346 unyielding... But ‘free’ is that in which I have choice, and may use or not, yet in such a way that it profit
347 my brother and not me.” Believers have an obligation to not make a “must” out of something that is
348 “free,” either with heavy-handed legalism or with “the loveless exercise of liberty.”⁵³

349 Luther closes the first sermon by restating the goal of winning others through the teaching of the
350 Gospel. It is a goal, Luther points out, that will not be won without showing love to our neighbors:

351 For there are many who are otherwise in accord with us and who would gladly accept this thing,
352 but they do not yet fully understand it—these we drive away. Therefore, let us show love to our
353 neighbors; if we do not do this, our work will not endure.⁵⁴

354 As long as love requires it, and as long as no harm is done to faith, patience can be practiced with those
355 who are weak in faith.

356 In his second sermon, given on Monday night, Luther deals with the “musts” that he introduced in the
357 first sermon, by chiefly addressing the issues surrounding the mass. Luther told the gathered assembly:

358 Thus the mass is an evil thing, and God is displeased with it, because it is performed as if it were
359 a sacrifice and a work of merit. Therefore it must be abolished. Here there can be no question or

⁵⁰ LW 51:71.

⁵¹ Buelow, 333.

⁵² LW 51:72.

⁵³ LW 51:74.

⁵⁴ LW 51:74.

360 doubt, any more than you should ask whether you should worship God. Here we are entirely
361 agreed: the private masses must be abolished.⁵⁵

362 Abolishing the language of the mass that turned the Lord's Supper into a sacrifice was an utter necessity.
363 Yet even in matters of necessity, Luther argues that Christian love never uses force or undue constraint.
364 So, how does the Christian proceed in dealing with a matter where Scripture has spoken clearly?
365 Luther's answer in this second sermon is: leave the matter to God and let the Word of God work! One
366 person cannot change or put faith into the heart of another. "That is God's work alone, who causes faith
367 to live in the heart... We should preach the Word, but the results must be left solely to God's good
368 pleasure." A little later in the sermon, Luther explains further, "We must first win the hearts of the
369 people. But that is done when I teach only the Word of God, preach the gospel."⁵⁶

370 Luther argues that God can accomplish more with His Word than all human authority heaped up. In fact,
371 this second sermon gives us perhaps Luther's most memorable saying about the power of the Word of
372 God to change hearts—and to change the world:

373 In short, I will preach it, teach it, write it, but I will constrain no man by force, for faith must
374 come freely without compulsion. Take myself as an example. I opposed indulgences and all the
375 papists, but never with force. I simply taught, preached, and wrote God's Word; otherwise I did
376 nothing. And while I slept, or drank Wittenberg beer with my friends Philip and Amsdorf, the
377 Word so greatly weakened the papacy that no prince or emperor ever inflicted such losses upon
378 it. I did nothing; the Word did everything.⁵⁷

379 Tuesday evening, in his third sermon, Luther moves from "must" to "free." He begins by agreeing once
380 more that private masses be abolished, but also reiterates the point that "no one should be dragged to
381 them or away from them by the hair, for I can drive no man to heaven or beat him into it with a club."⁵⁸

382 From there he moves into a discussion of those things that are left by God as free choices for each
383 person, such as entering into marriage or choosing to leave the cloister. In the end, each individual has
384 to stand before God and the world. Luther reminds his flock that the devil will not leave them alone in
385 the hour of death:

386 It is not enough to say: this man or that man did it, I followed the crowd, according to the
387 preaching of the dean, Dr. Karlstadt, or Gabriel, or Michael. Not so; every one must stand on his
388 own feet and be prepared to give battle to the devil. You must rest upon a strong and clear text
389 of Scripture if you would stand the test.⁵⁹

390 Luther directs those priests who have taken wives and nuns who have married husbands to rest their
391 consciences on the "strong and clear text" of 1 Timothy 4:1-3:

392 The Spirit clearly says that, in later times, some will fall away from the faith, because they
393 devote themselves to deceitful spirits and the doctrines of demons, in connection with the
394 hypocrisy of liars, whose own consciences have been seared. They forbid people to marry and

⁵⁵ LW 51:75.

⁵⁶ LW 51:76.

⁵⁷ LW 51:77.

⁵⁸ LW 51:79.

⁵⁹ LW 51:80.

395 order them to abstain from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those
396 who believe and know the truth.

397 Luther asserts that the devil cannot overthrow this text, but rather this passage will overthrow and
398 devour the devil. By the same token, choosing to remain in the monastery or convent is not a sin either.
399 “The cowl will not strangle you,” Luther says, “if you are already wearing one.”⁶⁰ Chastity needs to
400 remain a liberty and not compulsive.

401 Another “free” that Luther addresses is the matter of images in the churches. Karlstadt had argued that
402 images should be removed on the basis of Exodus 20, since God forbade the Israelites to fashion graven
403 images. According to his line of reasoning, to reverence an image such as a painting or a statue was to
404 have an idol in one’s heart. Yet Luther plays “devil’s advocate” with Karlstadt’s argument, pointing out
405 examples in the Old Testament when God’s people were told to fashion images. In Numbers 21, the
406 Lord told Moses to fashion a bronze serpent. In Exodus 37, the Lord told the Israelites to erect two
407 golden cherubim for the mercy seat on the ark of the covenant. He pointed out how the problem was
408 never with the images themselves, but with the worship of images. Luther also questioned the tactic of
409 breaking down altars and burning images. “Do you really believe that you can abolish the altars in this
410 way? No, you will only set them up more firmly.”⁶¹

411 At the beginning of his fourth sermon, on Wednesday, Luther picks up the subject of images once more.
412 Only he brings up a reason for abolishing images that everyone else has missed: works righteousness.
413 Almost everyone understands that the crucifix on the altar is not God, but simply a sign. Yet whoever
414 donated the crucifix imagines to themselves, “I’ve done something for God!” Luther calls it “downright
415 idolatry,” but even that fine idolatry is not a good enough reason to remove paintings, altars, and
416 crosses from the churches. “Why? Because we must admit that there are still some people who hold no
417 such wrong opinion of them, but to whom they may well be useful.”⁶² In the end, the image is not the
418 enemy; the enemy is our own human heart.

419 Luther then transitions to the observance of fast-days, particularly those that involved the consumption
420 of meat. His first point was that fasting should not be a detriment to your health. If a person is sick, he
421 should eat whatever he needs to eat. Secondly, if the pope says that no one can eat meat on Friday,
422 then the Christian should eat meat on Friday just “to spite him.” Thirdly, treat well-meaning people who
423 are weak in their faith differently than those who are stubborn:

424 We must bear patiently with these people and not use our liberty; since it brings no peril or
425 harm to body or soul; in fact, it is rather salutary, and we are doing our brothers and sisters a
426 great service besides. But if we use our liberty unnecessarily, and deliberately cause offense to
427 our neighbor, we drive away the very one who in time would come to our faith.⁶³

⁶⁰ LW 51:80-81.

⁶¹ LW 51:83.

⁶² LW 51:84.

⁶³ LW 51:87.

428 Luther exhorts his hearers to use their liberty at the proper time, so that neither Christian liberty may
 429 suffer injury, nor offense be given to weaker brothers and sisters who yet have no knowledge of this
 430 liberty for themselves.⁶⁴

431 In connection with the correct use of Christian liberty, Luther's Thursday night sermon dealt with the
 432 observance of the Sacrament of the Altar. One of the central controversies in Wittenberg dealt with the
 433 practice Karlstadt instituted on Christmas Day of placing the host and the chalice into the very hands of
 434 the parishioners, something that had never been done before and was highly offensive to many tender
 435 hearts. Luther begins by addressing this practice.

436 He starts off by pointing out the folly in the canon law whereby the pope winks at priests sleeping with
 437 their maids, but at the same time cries foul when a woman touches the altar linens or (the horror!) the
 438 host.⁶⁵ Then Luther goes on to say this:

439 But you now go ahead and become as foolish as the pope, in that you think that a person must
 440 touch the sacrament with his hands. You want to prove that you are good Christians by touching
 441 the sacrament with your hands, and thus you have dealt with the sacrament, which is our
 442 highest treasure, in such a way that it is a wonder you were not struck to the ground by thunder
 443 and lightning. All the other things God might have suffered, but this he cannot allow, because
 444 you have made a compulsion of it.⁶⁶

445 In the end, though Luther was convinced that the disciples of the Lord took the sacrament in their own
 446 hands, and that the Wittenbergers may do the same without sinning, he could not defend what they did
 447 by turning the practice into a "must" when it ought to remain a "free." "Although I must acknowledge
 448 that you committed no sin when you touched the sacrament with your hands," Luther said,
 449 "nevertheless I must tell you that it was not a good work, because it caused offense everywhere." He
 450 urged the congregation to serve those who are weak in faith by abstaining from their liberty and
 451 voluntarily giving up the practice of receiving both the bread and the cup in their own hands.⁶⁷

452 Luther had similar advice for receiving both the bread and wine in the Sacrament, that the church must
 453 not compel people to partake of the Supper in both kinds without prior instruction in the Word of God.
 454 "We must rather promote and practice and preach the Word, and then afterwards leave the result and
 455 execution of it entirely to the Word, giving everyone his freedom in this matter." Luther felt so strongly
 456 about this that, if the congregation were not willing to give up their practice of receiving "both kinds" in
 457 communion, Luther threatened to leave, saying, "I shall regret that I ever preached so much as one
 458 sermon in this place."⁶⁸

459 Luther's sixth sermon strives to define the proper reception of the Eucharist, foreshadowing what he
 460 would write in his Small Catechism eight years later. It has nothing to do with whether one receives the
 461 bread and the cup in their hands. Nor does it have to do with whether one receives only the bread or
 462 both the bread and the cup. Faith alone makes one's reception of the Sacrament worthy and acceptable
 463 before God. So, what is faith? It is "a firm trust that Christ, the Son of God, stands in our place and has

⁶⁴ LW 51:88.

⁶⁵ Buelow, 344.

⁶⁶ LW 51:89.

⁶⁷ LW 51:90.

⁶⁸ LW 51:91.

464 taken all our sins upon his shoulders and that he is the eternal satisfaction for our sin and reconciles us
465 with God the Father.”

466 This is why laws that command Christians to attend the Sacrament, such as at Easter, are foolish. They
467 drive people to the sacrament regardless of faith. “He who has such faith has his rightful place here and
468 receives the sacrament as an assurance, or seal, or sign to assure him of God’s promise and grace. But,
469 of course, we do not all have such faith; would God one-tenth of the Christians had it!”⁶⁹ Luther goes so
470 far as to even tell his parishioners not to attend the Lord’s Supper if they were not properly prepared:

471 This food demands a hungry and longing man, for it delights to enter a hungry soul, which is
472 constantly battling with its sins and eager to be rid of them.

473 He who is not thus prepared should abstain for a while from this sacrament, for this food will
474 not enter a sated and full heart, and if it comes to such a heart, it is harmful. Therefore, if we
475 think upon and feel within us such distress of conscience and the fear of a timid heart, we shall
476 come with all humbleness and reverence and not run to it brashly and hastily, without all fear
477 and humility...

478 Therefore those who are most worthy, who are constantly being assailed by death and the devil,
479 and they are the ones to whom it is most opportunely given, in order that they may remember
480 and firmly believe that nothing can harm them, since they now have with them him from whom
481 none can pluck them away; let come death, devil, or sin, they cannot harm them...

482 For this bread is a comfort for the sorrowing, a healing for the sick, a life for the dying, a food for
483 all the hungry, and a rich treasure for all the poor and needy.⁷⁰

484 The sermon reflected one of Luther’s central themes for the week: “true reformation must start in the
485 heart, not in outward practices.”⁷¹

486 In his seventh sermon, Luther turns his attention to the fruit of the sacrament, namely love. He asserts
487 that he does not see much love among his people in Wittenberg. Luther compares his congregation to
488 the standard the apostle Paul sets forth in 1 Corinthians 13:

489 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong
490 or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and know all the mysteries and have all
491 knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If
492 I give away everything I own, and if I give up my body that I may be burned but do not have love,
493 I gain nothing.

494 He tells them, “Not yet have you come so far as this, though you have received great and rich gifts from
495 God, the highest of which is a knowledge of the Scriptures.” He critiques the city’s attempt to fix poverty
496 by outlawing begging. “No one as yet has given his goods to the poor, no one has yet been burned, and
497 even these things would be nothing without love.” Luther observed:

⁶⁹ LW 51:93.

⁷⁰ LW 51:94-95.

⁷¹ Buelow 348.

498 You are willing to take all of God’s goods in the sacrament, but you are not willing to pour them
 499 out again in love. Nobody extends a helping hand to another, nobody seriously considers the
 500 other person, but everyone looks out for himself and his own gain, insists on his own way, and
 501 lets everything else go hang. If anybody is helped, well and good; but nobody looks after the
 502 poor to see how you might be able to help them. This is a pity.⁷²

503 Luther closed the sermon with a warning about what will happen if the people refuse to love one
 504 another: “God will not have his Word revealed and preached in vain.” Though they had received the
 505 greatest blessing of all, the gift of God’s pure Word, they were not listening. Instead they were “playing
 506 around with all kinds of tomfoolery which does not amount to anything.”⁷³

507 After that seventh sermon on Saturday night, the people of God in Wittenberg were probably ready to
 508 confess their sins on Sunday morning. (Or at least they should have been after that powerful law
 509 preaching.) Fittingly for his final sermon in this series, Luther addressed the practice of auricular private
 510 confession. Luther distinguishes between three kinds of confession. The first, outlined by Christ in
 511 Matthew 18, is what we would call “church discipline” today, beginning with one Christian addressing
 512 another about his or her sin, and eventually bringing in witnesses, all the way up to the point of
 513 addressing the matter before the congregation, all with the goal of leading the sinner to repent. The
 514 second kind of confession is personal confession, where individuals by themselves wrestle with God in
 515 prayer over their sins. The third kind of confession is the sort of confession where “one takes another
 516 aside and tells him what troubles one, so that one may hear from him a word of comfort.”⁷⁴

517 The pope made a “free” into a “must” when he commanded mandatory confession. “Nevertheless,”
 518 Luther says, “I will allow no man to take private confession away from me, and I would not give it up for
 519 all the treasures in the world, since I know what comfort and strength it has given me.”⁷⁵ Luther
 520 recognized the unique blessings that come from confessing one’s sins and hearing the word of
 521 absolution and forgiveness for the sake of Christ. We do not have all the answers for ourselves, so it
 522 makes sense that we take a brother aside and tell him our troubles. Not to mention the promise of the
 523 absolution, which is the reason why someone comes to private confession in the first place: that the
 524 word of forgiveness spoken is as valid as from God himself.⁷⁶

525 The more absolutions, the better! Luther hits on an idea in this sermon that would permeate many of
 526 his other writings and even find its way into the Smalcald Articles. God has not left us with one
 527 absolution, comfort, or strength for our conscience:

528 [B]ut we have many absolutions in the gospel and we are richly showered with many
 529 absolutions... Another comfort we have in the Lord’s Prayer: “Forgive us our trespasses,” etc. A
 530 third is our baptism, when I reason thus: See, my Lord, I have been baptized in thy name so that
 531 I may be assured of thy grace and mercy. Then we have private confession, when I go and
 532 receive a sure absolution as if God himself spoke it, so that I may be assured that my sins are

⁷² LW 51:96.

⁷³ LW 51:96.

⁷⁴ LW 51:97-98.

⁷⁵ LW 51:98.

⁷⁶ LW 51:98-99.

533 forgiven. Finally, I take to myself the blessed sacrament, when I eat his body and drink his blood
534 as a sign that I am rid of my sins and God has freed me from all my frailties.⁷⁷

535 In light of all those gospel forms, all those “absolutions,” which God has given us in our battle with the
536 devil, why would we ever allow any of those weapons to be taken away? Luther leaves his hearers with
537 that thought as he moves toward his conclusion.

538 Luther concludes this last sermon with the voice of one who in his own life has fought with Satan. The
539 commanding quality of his sermons grew out of the fact that he knew the devil’s wiles.⁷⁸ “I have eaten a
540 bit of salt or two with him,” Luther says. “I know him well and he knows me well, too.” At that point the
541 good Doctor commends his people to God and says, “Amen.”⁷⁹

542 Message Received

543 Luther’s message was well-crafted, and at the same time delivered with the passion of a shepherd for
544 his flock. According to eyewitnesses, “Luther had spoken with unsurpassed eloquence, solemnity, and
545 passion, outdoing himself.”⁸⁰ Early 20th century Luther biographer Henry Jacobs notes that even though
546 Luther may have been tempted to go after Karlstadt, Zwilling, and others personally, “neither a word of
547 denunciation, nor the least reference to the leaders of the agitation, escaped his lips.”⁸¹ One of Luther’s
548 students, Albert Burer, in his famous letter describing the experience of seeing and hearing Luther
549 preach that week shared the following:

550 Judged by his face, Luther is a kind man and appears mild and good-natured. His voice is
551 pleasant and sonorous, and one must marvel at his winsome gift of speech. What he says,
552 teaches, and does is quite pious, even though his godless opponents claim the opposite.
553 Whoever has heard him once—unless he is a stone—would gladly hear him again and again, for
554 he drives home his points, like nails, into the minds of his hearers.⁸²

555 More than anything else, the sermons conveyed a distillation of what Luther learned and wrote during
556 his time at the Wartburg. “Without months of preparation in seclusion he could hardly have given such
557 straightforward and compelling answers to the questions that had plunged the Wittenbergers into
558 conflict.”⁸³

559 So, how did his congregation respond? “The Wittenberg congregation, who flocked to hear him,
560 submitted immediately to Luther’s authority.”⁸⁴ The lawyer, Jerome Schurf, wrote to Elector Frederick to
561 say that “great joy and exultation among the learned and the uneducated has sprung from Dr. Martin’s
562 return and from his sermons.”⁸⁵ Melancthon was glad to subordinate himself once more to Luther’s

⁷⁷ *LW 51:99.*

⁷⁸ Bornkamm, 73.

⁷⁹ *LW 51:100.*

⁸⁰ Brecht, 61.

⁸¹ Jacobs, 216.

⁸² Bornkamm, 74.

⁸³ Bornkamm, 73.

⁸⁴ Brecht, 61.

⁸⁵ Bornkamm, 74.

563 leadership. Even Gabriel Zwilling realized the harm he was causing, repented, and fell in line with
564 Luther.⁸⁶

565 Karlstadt alone was resentful. Over time, he persisted in trying to bring about reforms without concern
566 for those who adhered to the old way. From this time on, he was isolated—partially his own doing, and
567 partially the doing of others. After 1523 Karlstadt took a call to pastorate in a nearby village, slowly
568 moving further away from the university and his responsibilities there.⁸⁷

569 In Wittenberg Luther instituted a one year moratorium on changes to the worship service. On Easter,
570 the City Church celebrated communion without the cup, in Latin, and with the usual vestments and
571 liturgy. They removed the offensive language from the mass that turned the Lord’s Supper into a
572 sacrifice. “But for those who desired it, there was also a special celebration of the Lord’s Supper in which
573 the communicants received both the bread and the wine.”⁸⁸ Later that spring he distilled his sermons
574 into a generally usable form entitled, *Receiving Both Kinds in the Sacrament*.

575 Luther’s strategy of letting the Word work on people’s hearts may have been correct, but it was not
576 always the easiest to implement, especially in the case of the stubborn who refuse to hear the Word.
577 When Luther brought a similar message to Erfurt as he had spoken at Wittenberg, things did not go as
578 well there.⁸⁹ Even in Wittenberg itself, some problem areas persisted. In particular, the clergy at the
579 Castle Church were resistant to any changes in the mass whatsoever. Two and a half years later in early
580 December of 1524, faced by the town council, the university, and the majority of citizens, the dean of
581 the Castle Church would finally acquiesce to removing the Roman mass.⁹⁰

582 Part 2: Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word—by Preserving the Truth 583 of Your Word Among Us

584 In addition to straightening things out in Wittenberg, Luther had another reason to return home in early
585 March of 1522. He had been working on something special, something which, when completed, would
586 finally put the Scriptures into the hands of the people—not just in Wittenberg, but all over Germany: a
587 translation of the Bible from the original languages of Greek and Hebrew into German.

588 The postils

589 During his visit to Wittenberg in December of 1521, his friends helped to settle in his mind the decision
590 to translate the Bible, beginning with the New Testament.⁹¹ Yet it was something Luther had been
591 considering for a long time. His solitude at the Wartburg made his months there wonderfully productive
592 and served to prepare him for the task. Throughout May of 1521 during his first weeks at the Wartburg,
593 before Luther received any of his unfinished work from Wittenberg, the only books he had with him to

⁸⁶ Bornkamm, 75.

⁸⁷ Brecht, 65.

⁸⁸ Bornkamm, 78.

⁸⁹ E. G. Schweibert, 543.

⁹⁰ E. G. Schweibert, 544.

⁹¹ Bornkamm, 38-39.

594 read were his copies of the Greek New Testament and Hebrew Bible.⁹² On May 26 Luther completed an
 595 exposition of Psalm 68. That summer he finished a commentary on Psalm 22, concluding a series on the
 596 Psalms that he had been working on over the three years prior.⁹³ He also finished his commentary on
 597 the Magnificat which he had begun prior to the Diet of Worms and, later in the year, he wrote a
 598 devotional exposition of Psalm 37.⁹⁴

599 Yet it was Luther's work on his German postils for Advent and Christmas where we see the wheels
 600 beginning to turn in Luther's mind around the need for people to know and have the Scriptures for
 601 themselves. A "postil," by the way, is a book of model sermons based on the Gospel lessons for the
 602 various Sundays of the church year. Before Luther had left Wittenberg, he had already begun composing
 603 his postils in Latin. At the Wartburg, he decided instead to publish these model sermons in German. In
 604 early June Luther In early June, Luther began translating and expositing the Gospel lessons for the
 605 Christmas season. By the middle of September he had covered the twelve days of Christmas and
 606 reached the Feast of Epiphany. Then Luther went back and completed his postil for the Advent season.
 607 His Christmas and Epiphany sermons were published in early March, followed the Advent sermons six
 608 weeks later.⁹⁵

609 These were sermons that Luther never preached himself, but were expositions that followed the thread
 610 of the Scripture text much the same way as homilies in the ancient church. "They were in the main
 611 intended for private reading, whether to stimulate the preacher or to edify the faithful."⁹⁶ While they
 612 counteracted false teaching and works righteousness, they also gave the laity a plain explanation of
 613 Scripture and provided pastors, who for the most part were poorly trained, material for their sermons.⁹⁷

614 At various points in his postils, Luther makes a concerted effort to direct his readers to the main point of
 615 Scripture, namely, Christ himself. In the conclusion of his sermon for the festival of Epiphany, Luther
 616 expresses the hope that his postil would serve as nothing more than a "scaffold" to aid in "the
 617 construction of the true building" of faith and understanding "so that we may ourselves grasp and taste
 618 the pure and simple word of God and abide in it."⁹⁸ Luther prefaced his Christmas postil with an
 619 introduction entitled *A Brief Instruction on What to Look for and Expect in the Gospels*. Many of the
 620 thoughts he set down in that introduction Luther would later reiterate in his preface to the New
 621 Testament. In it Luther wanted his readers to know that "the main thing in Scripture is the gospel and its
 622 basis in Christ as the one gift God gives to everyone... This is the center around which the entire Bible
 623 revolves."⁹⁹ He included similar thoughts in his Advent postil, in which he "exhorted all Christians to
 624 make daily use of the Bible, for it alone gave patience and comfort."¹⁰⁰ In his mind already by the end of
 625 the year was the notion of a German Bible to make the fulfillment of that exhortation possible.

⁹² Bornkamm, 3.

⁹³ Bornkamm, 3, 5-6.

⁹⁴ Bornkamm, 12.

⁹⁵ Bornkamm, 33.

⁹⁶ Bornkamm, 34.

⁹⁷ Jacobs, 200-201. Brecht, 17.

⁹⁸ Bornkamm, 34-35.

⁹⁹ Brecht, 16-17.

¹⁰⁰ Brecht, 46.

626 Eleven Weeks

627 Fourteen other German editions of the Bible already existed by Luther's day, but most were wooden
 628 translations, and none of them were based on the original languages, only the Latin Vulgate.¹⁰¹ Early in
 629 the summer of 1521, Luther's friend and fellow monk from Erfurt, John Lang, translated the Gospel of
 630 Matthew from Erasmus's edition of the Greek New Testament.¹⁰² Somewhere along the way Luther
 631 heard about his friend's accomplishment. That December, after returning to the Wartburg from his
 632 secret visit to Wittenberg, Luther wrote Lang and announced his own intent to begin translating the
 633 entire New Testament into German.¹⁰³ He did not, however, want Lang to cease his own translating
 634 work. In the same letter Luther told Lang, "I wish every town would have its interpreter, and that this
 635 book alone, in all languages, would live in the hands, eyes, ears, and hearts of all people."¹⁰⁴

636 Love both for his people and for the Scriptures themselves were the motivating factors for Luther. The
 637 Bible had made Luther what he was; so it was only natural that his career as a reformer would extend to
 638 translating it into the common language of his countrymen. "It was through the Bible that he had
 639 learned how to escape the confinement of scholastic theology, and it was in the Bible that he had
 640 rediscovered the heart of the gospel. The Bible was his sole companion during his hours of loneliness,
 641 the one weapon in his struggle against a thousand-year-old system."¹⁰⁵

642 With that desire to put the Word of God into people's hands and hearts, Luther began the task of
 643 translating the New Testament into German. He used Erasmus's second edition of the Greek New
 644 Testament, published in Basel in 1519.¹⁰⁶ Luther would have preferred to begin with the Old Testament,
 645 but since he was alone and had limited grammatical and lexical helps available to him, it made sense for
 646 Luther to start with the New Testament.¹⁰⁷ He had two helpful resources that aided his translation: his
 647 personal copy of the Latin Bible and Erasmus's own Latin translation of his own edition of the Greek
 648 New Testament, complete with grammatical notes.¹⁰⁸ In addition to helpful resources for handling the
 649 Greek, Luther also relied on his facility with the German language. All the polemical and devotional
 650 literature that he had written in the past were a great help to him in expressing the thoughts and words
 651 of Scripture in his mother tongue.¹⁰⁹ Beginning almost immediately upon his return to the Wartburg in
 652 December, Luther finished his rough draft by the middle of February. It only took eleven weeks.¹¹⁰

653 The September Testament

654 When Luther departed for Wittenberg at the beginning of March, in addition to coming to the aid of his
 655 flock, he wanted the opportunity to polish his translation with the help of his friends. In addition, there
 656 were also resources in Wittenberg that were unavailable to him at the Wartburg.¹¹¹

¹⁰¹ Jacobs, 206.

¹⁰² Brecht, 46.

¹⁰³ Brecht, 46-47.

¹⁰⁴ *LW 48:356*.

¹⁰⁵ Bornkamm, 44.

¹⁰⁶ Schaff, 356.

¹⁰⁷ Bornkamm, 43-44.

¹⁰⁸ Bornkamm, 45.

¹⁰⁹ Brecht, 49.

¹¹⁰ Bornkamm, 45. Brecht, 47.

¹¹¹ Bornkamm, 79-80.

657 When Luther arrived at Wittenberg, he enlisted the help of especially Philip Melanchthon and George
 658 Spalatin. Together, they carefully went over Luther's translation. Luther's friends proved extremely
 659 helpful when they encountered perplexing "bumps in the road." Spalatin's connections allowed them
 660 access to the elector's treasury, where they borrowed precious stones to provide a clearer rendering of
 661 the heavenly Jerusalem's appearance in Revelation 21. Melanchthon delightfully dipped his toe into the
 662 "enigmatic field" of numismatics (coin-collecting) so that he could find information on the current value
 663 of coins mentioned in the Bible. Spalatin, a scholar in his own right, was big help in translating difficult
 664 passages.¹¹²

665 The book was completed on September 20, 1522, hence the nickname the *September Testament*.¹¹³
 666 Lucas Cranach and Christian Döring were listed as publishers, with Cranach contributing twenty-one full-
 667 page woodcut illustrations for the Book of Revelation. Melchior Lotther served as the printer. Luther
 668 himself wrote a preface for the entire work, and also prefaces for each of the individual books. "Luther
 669 intended that his introductory words provide the reader with the key to seeing the New Testament in its
 670 wholeness as well as its diversity."¹¹⁴ As he picked up some of his thoughts from the *Brief Instruction* he
 671 had included in his postils, Luther characterized the whole New Testament as a gospel-book, "that is, 'a
 672 good message [*Botschaft*], good tidings [*Mär*], good news [*Zeitung*], a good report [*Geschrei*],' and the
 673 telling of that story."¹¹⁵ His preface to Paul's letter to the Romans stands in a class by itself as a summary
 674 of Luther's theology, specifically of his doctrine of justification.¹¹⁶ Luther sincerely wanted people to
 675 read their Bibles, and to understand what they read in the light of Christ.

676 Given how successful everyone knew the book was going to be, one might think Luther would have
 677 received a hefty honorarium for the work he and his friends had done. One would be mistaken. "Just as
 678 for all his other writings, Luther asked for no honorarium for the translation, and he received none. The
 679 printers and publishers did a good business with the Bible translation. Luther, to his irritation, did not
 680 even receive enough free copies."¹¹⁷

681 A True German Translation

682 Luther did not slavishly hold to a particular theory of translation, occasionally taking astonishing liberties
 683 with the text. Brecht summarizes Luther's approach to the task:

684 He simplified the ponderous Hebrew use of nouns by employing more verbs and adjectives.
 685 Where it appeared theologically necessary to him, however, he chose the literal rendering over
 686 the better German formulation. Even today, in significant passages like John 3:16 or 1 Tim. 1:15-
 687 16, one can hear the depth of Luther's concern for a well-spoken sentence with a moving
 688 cadence. This contributed considerably to the ease with which central Bible passages could be
 689 remembered.¹¹⁸

690 Luther's rendering of John 3:16 reads as follows:

¹¹² Bornkamm, 80.

¹¹³ Bornkamm, 80.

¹¹⁴ Bornkamm, 81.

¹¹⁵ Brecht, 51.

¹¹⁶ Brecht, 51-52.

¹¹⁷ Brecht, 47.

¹¹⁸ Brecht, 50.

691 *“Also hat GOtt die Welt geliebet, daß er seinen eingeborenen Sohn gab, auf daß alle, die an ihn*
 692 *glauben, nicht verloren werden, sondern das ewige Leben haben.”*¹¹⁹

693 Here is the recently published Evangelical Heritage Version of the same for comparison:

694 *“For God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him*
 695 *shall not perish, but have eternal life.”*

696 For Luther the gospel was meant for the ear as much as the eye. The result yielded a true German
 697 translation in all respects. In his translation he used forceful words, a brevity of expression, and simple
 698 declarative sentences. He utilizes proper German grammar and word order, placing the predicate almost
 699 always at the end of the sentence.¹²⁰ He also invented words that found their way into the German
 700 vocabulary: “Expressions such as scapegoat (*Sündenbock*), decoy (*Lockvogel*), stopgap (*Lückenbüßer*), or
 701 eaves trough (*Dachrinne*) were his creations.”¹²¹ Luther even imported German vocabulary for biblical
 702 weights and measures:

703 He turned the Hebrew shekel into a *Silberling*, the Greek drachma and Roman denarius into a
 704 German *Groschen*, the quadrans into a *Heller*, the Hebrew measures into *Scheffel*, *Malter*,
 705 *Tonne*, *Centner*, and the Roman centurion into a *Hauptmann*. He substituted even *undeutsch* (!)
 706 for barbarian in 1 Cor. 14:11.¹²²

707 Using the dialect of the Saxon court which was also employed for diplomatic intercourse between the
 708 emperor and his various estates, Luther found a way to a form of German that most Germans could
 709 understand.¹²³ According to Brecht, “At least some eighty or ninety percent of Luther’s linguistic
 710 expressions, substantially more than in the earlier translation, could be understood in both southern
 711 and northern Germany.”¹²⁴ Schaff describes Luther’s translation as “an idiomatic reproduction of the
 712 Bible in the very spirit of the Bible.”¹²⁵ In fact, Luther’s New Testament helped to unify and create the
 713 modern German language.¹²⁶ Brecht opines that connecting Luther’s role with the development of High
 714 German “only hints at the significance of his Bible translation for the history of literature. Its place in
 715 literature is solely the result of the masterful linguistic and theological achievement reflected in the
 716 translation itself.”¹²⁷

717 And the Old Testament too!

718 The first edition of three thousand copies of the New Testament sold out. By December, Luther
 719 published his second edition, already slightly improved over the first.¹²⁸

720 Even before the New Testament was printed, however, Luther had started in on the Old Testament. As
 721 time went by, they involved more men in the work. Luther “founded a *Collegium Biblicum*, or Bible club,

¹¹⁹ Luther Bibel 1545.

¹²⁰ Bornkamm, 47.

¹²¹ Brecht, 49.

¹²² Schaff, 359.

¹²³ Schaff, 358.

¹²⁴ Brecht, 49.

¹²⁵ Schaff, 359.

¹²⁶ Kittelson, 175.

¹²⁷ Brecht, 49.

¹²⁸ Bornkamm, 85.

722 consisting of his colleagues Melancthon, Bugenhagen, Cruciger, Justas Jonas, and Aurogallus. They met
 723 once a week in his house, several hours before supper."¹²⁹ The work took substantially longer. In the
 724 end, the Old Testament took another ten years to produce. In 1534 the entire German Bible finally came
 725 off the press.¹³⁰

726 Though the book was officially banned by Duke George of Saxony, Duke William of Bavaria, and
 727 Archduke Ferdinand of Austria, nothing could stop the spread of God's Word. "Hans Lufft at Wittenberg
 728 printed and sold in forty years (between 1534 and 1574) about a hundred thousand copies—an
 729 enormous number for that age—and these were read by millions."¹³¹ Luther's Bible "spoke the language
 730 of the entire people, from the studies of the learned to the huts of the common folk, and thanks to its
 731 unprecedented spread through print it reached all levels of society."¹³²

732 Controversy over "by faith *alone*"

733 One of the tests of a Bible translation is how well it stands up to criticism over time. Immediately after
 734 its publication, opponents of Luther seized on his translation of Romans 3:28: "So halten wir es nun, daß
 735 der Mensch gerecht werde ohne des Gesetzes Werke, **allein** durch den Glauben."¹³³ Translation: *For we*
 736 *conclude that a person is justified by faith **alone** without the works of the law.* "Allein"—"alone"—does
 737 not appear in St. Paul's original Greek.

738 In *Martin Luther: Creative Translator*, Heinz Bluhm explored Luther's defense of his translation of
 739 Romans 3:28, which Luther had written in 1530. In essence, as Brecht summarizes it, Luther argued that
 740 "it was in accord with good German style to place 'alone' in apposition to a negative order to strengthen
 741 the force."¹³⁴ After establishing the essential meaning¹³⁴ of the text, Luther went on to render it "in the
 742 best German he was capable of writing. "And the best German... required the insertion of *allein*."¹³⁵
 743 Luther contended that German uses the word *allein* when two statements are being made which
 744 declare the opposite of one another, as is the case in Romans 3:28.¹³⁶ In the end, does Luther's defense
 745 hold up? Grammatically, it does so. Bluhm's analysis of Luther's translation hits on three main points:

- 746 1. Luther was a careful translator. He might have taken liberties when quoting Scripture in his
 747 writings, "However, when he undertook the formal and official translation of the Bible late
 748 in 1521, there was a major change in his fundamental approach. He did not take any
 749 liberties with the text unless German linguistic usage... allowed or even called for some
 750 modification."¹³⁷
- 751 2. Romans 3:28 is the climax in a whole series of verses, containing a "grand summary" of
 752 everything that preceded it, and anticipating everything to follow. A good translation
 753 demanded that the reader pay special attention to the passage. "Small wonder then that

¹²⁹ Schaff, 347.

¹³⁰ Bornkamm, 87.

¹³¹ Schaff, 350.

¹³² Bornkamm, 49-50

¹³³ Emphasis added.

¹³⁴ Brecht, 50.

¹³⁵ Bluhm, Heinz. 1965. "The Original's Intent and the Modern Idiom." Chap. 6 in *Martin Luther: Creative Translator*, by Heinz Bluhm, 125-137. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House. 129.

¹³⁶ Bluhm, 129.

¹³⁷ Bluhm, 135.

754 Luther went out of his way to render this crucial verse in the clearest and strongest way” by
 755 adding *allein*.¹³⁸
 756 3. As a concerned translator and as someone who had lectured on the letter to the Romans for
 757 years, Luther “was fully aware of the peculiar place of this particular verse in the larger
 758 whole.” Therefore, “Luther’s version of Rom. 3:28 is manifestly the creation of a mind at
 759 once aflame with one of the greatest self-revelations of Paul and at the same time
 760 wondrously able to express what he felt at the moment of affective reading.”¹³⁹

761 For these reasons one could argue that Luther was well justified in his translation on justification in
 762 Romans 3:28. Bluhm praises Luther as the “translator’s translator:” “In sheer mastery of language, he is
 763 easily the equal of Jerome. In religious insight, he is at least the equal of Augustine.”¹⁴⁰

764 Conclusion

765 At the beginning of *Receiving Both Kinds in the Sacrament*, Luther’s treatise which summarized the main
 766 points of his *Invocavit Sermons*, he warns that the world’s hatred and persecution is the least of our
 767 troubles:

768 Even Satan is not satisfied with that; he plans to exercise his malice within our own ranks. If
 769 outwardly we are too strong for his stooges... he will rend and destroy us inwardly through
 770 ourselves... So henceforth we must have regard to ourselves rather than to our enemies from
 771 without.¹⁴¹

772 In the town of Wittenberg in Luther’s day, Satan used people’s zeal and impatience for ecclesiastical and
 773 societal change to turn those who would be offended by innovative practices away from hearing the
 774 truth of God’s Word. The consciences of the strong were seared and hardened against the plight of the
 775 weak in the conviction that “what we’re doing is right.” The spirit of legalism that formed around
 776 whether or not a person received the Lord’s Supper in “both kinds”—or even in both hands—led people
 777 to a false piety and self-righteousness before God. Instead of focusing on the needs of their neighbor,
 778 the argument was over “my rights.” Instead of looking to Satan as the enemy, people saw each other as
 779 the enemy. Instead of putting their faith in the Word of God to do its work, leaders put their faith in
 780 rules, laws and ordinances.

781 So, where is the devil trying to rend and destroy us inwardly through ourselves? Where does he see
 782 opportunities among us to plant stumbling blocks that will turn people off to the gospel? Where is our
 783 Adversary rubbing his hands together at the opportunity to foment self-righteous attitudes in our midst?
 784 Where have we demanded and insisted upon our rights instead of showing love to our brothers and
 785 sisters in Christ whose consciences may be weak? In what areas of our own life and the life of our church
 786 have we placed our trust in the rules and ordinances of human beings instead of in the Word of God?
 787 Where do Luther’s words to his own flock hit home for us personally, for our congregations, and for our

¹³⁸ Bluhm, 136.

¹³⁹ Bluhm, 136-137.

¹⁴⁰ Bluhm, 137.

¹⁴¹ Luther, Martin. 1959. *Receiving Both Kinds in the Sacrament*. Vol. 36, in *Luther's Works, Volume 36: Word and Sacrament II*, edited by Abdel Ross Wentz and Helmut T. Lehmann, translated by Abdel Ross Wentz, 231-267. Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press. 237.

788 synod? How true is it for you and I when Luther says, “You are willing to take all of God’s goods in the
789 sacrament, but you are not willing to pour them out again in love”.¹⁴²

790 As Luther says, we must have regard to ourselves. Only, once we get a good look at ourselves, it is not a
791 pretty picture. We have failed to trust the Word of God, just as we have failed to pour the gifts of
792 Christ’s love into our lives.

793 Yet we are not without hope. In the fifth of his *Invocavit Sermons*, Luther says, “Therefore, dear friends,
794 we must be on firm ground, if we are to withstand the devil’s attack,”¹⁴³ alluding to these latter verses of
795 Ephesians 6:

796 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you
797 can stand against the schemes of the Devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but
798 against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world rulers of this darkness, against the
799 spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. For this reason, take up the full armor of God, so
800 that you will be able to take a stand on the evil day and, after you have done everything, to
801 stand (Eph 6:10-13).

802 In the end, as we think about the challenges that the church faces, the real challenge and struggle takes
803 place in each individual human heart in the evil day, that is, the day of our death, when the devil will
804 tempt us to question everything we have ever done. On our own that fight cannot be won. In the evil
805 day, when the devil comes with the full force of his accusations, it will not take much for him to knock us
806 down for all eternity.

807 Yet the Word of God is where our help is found! It is the solid foundation on which we stand in that evil
808 day, the protective armor that repels and withstands Satan’s accusations and temptations. For the Word
809 of God gives us Christ, who fought the fight and won—for us! Jesus Christ defeated Satan once and for
810 all at the cross with His holy death in our place, setting us free from the devil’s accusations in the power
811 of His resurrection. Christ has declared us righteous through the power of His resurrection from the
812 dead, and through the gift of the Holy Spirit which He has poured out on us in His Word and Sacraments.
813 Through the Holy Scriptures, the Savior armors us with His own righteousness that He won for us, the
814 righteousness that can stand in the face of any attack or accusation.

815 This is the armor that Martin Luther wanted everyone to have. His love for God’s people and his desire
816 to share the good news of the Savior who had done so much for him drove him in many of his
817 endeavors. That love and that desire made his preaching so engaging as he taught the law and the
818 gospel from the pulpit. That love and that desire also formed his patience in dealing with those who
819 were still on the fence about the Reformation. Ultimately, it moved Luther to put the Bible into the
820 language of his own people.

821 You and I are the recipients of lasting blessings from the legacy of Luther’s love for souls and for the
822 gospel. It’s estimated that there are more than six billion Bibles currently in print, with a hundred million
823 more being printed every year around the world.¹⁴⁴ The Scriptures are freely available to us whenever

¹⁴² LW 51:96.

¹⁴³ LW 51:90.

¹⁴⁴ Rizzo, Nicholas. 2022. *32 Bible Sales Statistics [2022]*. February 2. Accessed May 30, 2022.
<https://wordrated.com/bible-sales-statistics/>.

824 and wherever we want, in a form that we can understand. We owe a debt of gratitude to God for
825 preserving His Word for us through faithful translators like Martin Luther.

826 We owe an even greater debt of gratitude for the gospel message itself. In this world full of temptations
827 and struggles, God has kept us in His kingdom of grace through the good news that we are saved by
828 God's grace alone apart from the works of the law through faith in Jesus Christ.

829 So, use the Word. Read and study the Bible. Make use of the "scaffolding" of sound Lutheran and
830 Christian commentary and instruction that points you to Christ in the Scriptures. Teach the Word.

831 Most importantly, trust the Word. Trust that the Word will work—on your heart, and on the hearts of
832 those around you. Trust that the Word will enable you and I to stand in the evil day, apart from our own
833 efforts, by redirecting us to Christ. Trust that the Word will help your neighbor to stand, when you speak
834 that Word in love. Luther nailed it when he said, "I simply taught, preached, and wrote God's Word... I
835 did nothing; the Word did everything." The Lord will keep you steadfast in His Word—now and always.
836 Amen.

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