

In Faith Formation (“Sunday School”) with kids this year, each week we gather we are introducing them to a “gift of the church.” Here is the story that went with last week’s sharing the gift of our Reformation history. –Pastor Rebecca

This is Martin Luther. He lived a long time ago—500 years ago! (Have you heard a similar name like that? Martin Luther King Jr.! They’re different people: Martin Luther King Jr. lived closer to 50 years ago and was named after this Martin Luther.) When Martin Luther was a child like you, he went to church too.

But he lived in a time when the church had forgotten some of God’s gifts. (Does that ever happen to gifts that you receive? Do you break them, get them dirty, forget to use them, or lose them? That’s what had happened to some of the gifts the church had gotten from God.)

One of the gifts the church had lost was the gift we call GRACE. Grace means God’s love, but it means **love-no-matter-what**. Grace means that God loves you even when

- You do something bad or something you know you’re not supposed to do.
- You haven’t done anything to deserve it.
- You make a mistake.
- You hurt yourself or other people.
- You break the rules.
- You don’t love yourself.
- It seems like no one else loves you.

That’s God’s grace. God’s love is much bigger than people’s love, so sometimes people forget how big it really is. God has given people the gift of Grace, but sometimes the church forgets that. That’s what happened to the church in Martin Luther’s time. They forgot about grace and taught that God only loved you when you followed all the rules and did good things.

Martin was always afraid that he wasn’t good enough for God, because he could never follow the rules just right or do enough good things. (Can you imagine how that would feel? Sad? Lonely? Frustrated?)

Martin Luther was special because he helped the church find the gift of God’s grace again. This is the story of how he did that.

Martin Luther grew up and became a teacher in the church. He read the Bible, and he discovered a surprise: God loved him even when he didn’t follow the rules just right. God loved him even when he didn’t do good things. God loved him **NO MATTER WHAT**. God was full of GRACE. Through reading the Bible, Martin got “gospel glasses” to see God’s Spirit and God’s love in the world. (Sometimes we call that the Holy Spirit.) He could see that God’s Spirit was doing something special in the church too: God’s Spirit was reminding everyone of God’s grace, and showing them again how big God’s love really is! Martin wanted to share this gift from God that he had discovered in the Bible.

To do that, Martin invited other teachers and pastors to a conversation. He wanted to say, "Do you know what I found? I found the gift of God's grace! Can we talk about that?" So he did something kind of cool, which is what people in his time when they wanted to talk about something important: He nailed a list of things that he wanted to talk about, to the church door.

Some people started to agree with Martin about God's grace. Other people in the church just wanted to keep doing what they were doing, because they were afraid that people would stop following the rules and doing good things if they knew about God's grace. Those people who agreed with Martin came together to talk more about God's grace, and they started being called "Luther-ans" after Martin Luther.

Martin Luther kept teaching about God's grace for the rest of his life. He helped people read the Bible for themselves so they could read about grace there. He also wrote a little book about the things we say in church, like the Lord's Prayer, so that people could understand better what the words really mean. We're going to learn more about these things in future gatherings together. (The book is called "The Small Catechism.")

Martin also made a picture to remind people of the most important things about God's grace. We call it "Luther's seal." We're going to make our own Luther's seals today to remind us of God's grace.

1. Black cross: Jesus died on the cross (and came back to life!).
2. Red heart: God loves us.
3. White rose: We have peace because we can trust Jesus (we don't have to be afraid, like Martin Luther was before he found grace).
4. Blue background: We have new life with God now and forever (the color reminds us of heaven).
5. Golden ring: God's love for us has no beginning and no ending, like a circle.

When we celebrate Reformation Sunday in two weeks, we're going to

1) Wear red: The Holy Spirit is associated with RED, like fire or love.

2) Remember how in Luther's time, when people wanted to talk about something important, they posted something on the door? We're going to hang the seals on our own church door, to tell everyone who comes, "We want to talk about God's grace!"