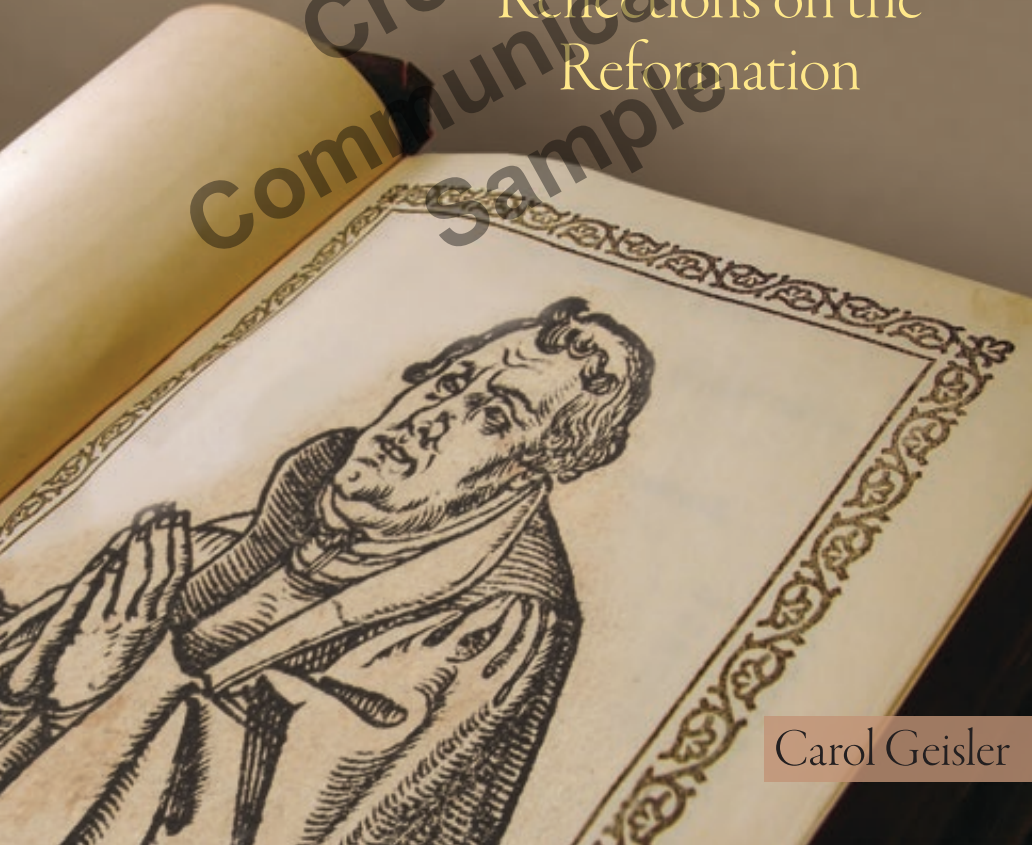


reformation

*The* WORD  
*at* WORK

History, Scripture and  
Reflections on the  
Reformation



Carol Geisler

# WORDS AND THE WORD

*And the Lord answered me: "Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so he may run who reads it. For still the vision awaits its appointed time; it hastens to the end—it will not lie ... the righteous shall live by his faith."*

*Habakkuk 2:2-4*

In Germany, the theme for the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017 is *Am Anfang war das Wort*, that is, "In the beginning was the Word" (John 1:1). Although those words of Scripture refer to Jesus, the Word made flesh, the anniversary in Germany celebrates the words of Martin Luther, the Augustinian monk who sought to reform the church. In Germany, Luther is honored as a national hero whose translation of the Bible into German influenced the development of the modern German language.

The printing press, perfected by Johann Gutenberg around 1450, was a fairly new development in Luther's world (Luther was born in 1483) and Luther himself would prove to be something of a gold mine for the publishing business. Words poured out of Luther—university lectures, sermons, statements for academic debate, essays, pamphlets, hymns, his catechisms, letters and more. His translation of the Bible was a best seller. Today the scholarly German edition of Luther's writings numbers well over 60,000 pages in more than 100 volumes.

Luther's challenging and inspiring words touched on many areas of life—church, government, war, education, family life and care for those in need. But above all else, Luther's words were about the Word of God, the inspired Word of Scripture and the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ. Martin Luther sought to turn the church of his day back to the clear teachings revealed in God's Word, the truth that we are saved, not by our own efforts, but by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

Luther made good use of the growing printing industry. While he understood the dangers possible through harmful books, he praised printing as a gift of God through which the good news of Jesus Christ could be made known to the world. For Luther, the word that mattered was the Word of

God. As far as Luther was concerned, he did not bring about the events of the Reformation. He did nothing, he said. The Word did everything.

## FOR REFLECTION

In our technology-driven world, we are surrounded by words on the printed page and words—and images—on screen. In many situations, and especially concerning words that touch on matters of faith, we must ask ourselves: “What is true?” We need to be like the believers in Berea who, after listening to the teachings of the apostle Paul, examined the Scriptures daily “to see if these things were so” (Acts 17:11). In matters of faith and Christian life, compare the words you hear and read to the Word of God. Are the teachings centered on Jesus the Word, who died and rose to save you? After all, in your salvation, you did nothing—the Word did everything.

- What words have you encountered that challenge your faith in Christ?
- How can you use your words—spoken, on paper and on screen—to glorify God?
- How can you become more faithfully involved in the study of God’s Word?

*Jesus, Word made flesh, lead me by your Spirit to read and study the words of Holy Scripture. Help me to find the right words to share my love for you with others, so that they too will come to know you as Lord. Amen.*





# RASH WORDS

*We know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ ... because by works of the law no one will be justified.*

*Galatians 2:16*

Martin Luther was born in Eisleben, Germany, on November 10, 1483. Baptized the next day, he was named for St. Martin of Tours, whose festival day was observed on November 11. Luther, of course, did not recall those events, but he later commented that he believed what his parents, Hans and Margaret, told him! Martin, who so loved words, was a good student. Among other subjects, he studied Latin, the language used in education, the church and business. In 1501, his earlier studies completed, he enrolled in the University of Erfurt to study law. This was, from his father's point of view, a wise decision that would lead to a promising career.

That career path changed abruptly in 1505. Caught out in a thunderstorm, Martin was terrified by a nearby lightning strike. Fearing God's wrath, the frightened student called on St. Anne for help and promised to become a monk. True to his rashly made vow, Luther entered the Augustinian monastery in Erfurt. His father Hans was not pleased with the career change, but Martin feared more the wrath of the heavenly Father. His vow to become a monk was made in a moment of panic, but his fears concerning sin, death and the judgment of God had filled his thoughts for a long time. The Christ who was his Savior was also a fearsome Judge who condemned sinners—including Martin—to hell. Luther believed that the work and severe hardships of monastic life would demonstrate his dedication to God. Through a regimented life of worship, prayer, study, confession and fasting, Luther hoped to earn God's favor. The worried young monk needed to find the right words that would bring peace to his troubled conscience.

## FOR REFLECTION

“There are no atheists in foxholes,” the saying goes, and there certainly wasn’t one on that storm-drenched road to Erfurt. Luther believed that God was ready and willing to strike him down for his sins. “How can I find a merciful God?” Luther would eventually find the answer to his question where we find it—revealed in the Word of God. There in the Word we learn that none of our good works, in a monastery or anywhere else, are ever enough to please God. We are saved only by God’s grace—his favor—through faith in Jesus Christ. The good works we do as we “walk in love, as Christ loved us” (Ephesians 5:2) do not earn salvation, but help and serve those around us. Through our words and actions the merciful God shows his mercy to others.

- When have you found yourself trying to please God or earn his favor by your own efforts and promises?
- Most religions of the world offer their disciples a path through life that teaches them to please their god or gods. How is the Christian faith different?
- How will you share the mercy of God at church, at home and at work?

*Heavenly Father, you have saved me by grace through faith in Jesus my Savior. Lead me by your Spirit to walk in the path of good works that you set before me, not to earn your favor, but to love and serve others in Jesus’ name. Amen.*



# PUZZLING WORDS

*For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”*

*Romans 1:16-17*

Luther worked hard as a monk. Ordained into the priesthood, he was sent to the University of Erfurt, this time to study the Bible instead of law. Even as he studied, Luther still agonized over his sins and God’s judgment. He endlessly confessed his sins, seeking peace with God. Johann von Staupitz, Luther’s monastic superior, tried to help the troubled monk find that elusive peace. Luther would later recall with gratitude his superior’s advice to keep his eyes fixed on Jesus.

After earning a degree in biblical studies, Luther was sent to the new university in Wittenberg to lecture on the Bible. After a brief return to the Erfurt monastery, Luther was once again assigned to Wittenberg. He received his doctor of theology degree there and preached at the town church and the Wittenberg monastery. At the university he lectured on the Psalms, then on the books of Romans and Galatians. As he studied the Scriptures, preparing for his lectures and sermons, he was increasingly troubled by the words, “the righteousness of God.” He understood that phrase to refer to the righteousness—or holiness—of God, who in righteous wrath punishes unrighteous sinners. Luther struggled with those puzzling and terrifying words as he wrestled with the vocabulary and grammar of Scripture.

It was a long process of study, but the Holy Spirit was, as he always is, at work in the Word. The merciful God led Luther to understand that “the righteousness of God” is a gift that God gives to sinners by grace through faith in Christ Jesus. The Son of God took all of our sins, our unrighteousness, onto himself on the cross and in exchange gives us his righteousness, his holiness. It was as the Old Testament prophet had said long ago. The vision that had awaited “its appointed time” in Christ Jesus had finally become clear



# reformation

## *The* WORD *at* WORK

History, Scripture and  
Reflections on the Reformation



Signs posted on streets and highways caution: “Men at Work.” Along the road to the Protestant Reformation we might find the sign: “The Word at Work.” Changed by his encounter with the Word of God and the Gospel message revealed there, a sixteenth-century German monk named Martin Luther used words—words in print, words spoken and sung—to point to the saving Word, Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh for our salvation.

These Scripture readings, historical sketches and brief devotions present events in the life of Martin Luther and the Reformation—words and events that direct our attention to the hard-working Word of God. As Luther himself once declared, he did not bring about the events of the Reformation. The Word did everything.

This book, along with many other Creative Communications for the Parish products, is available on [amazonkindle](#) and [nook](#)

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YEARS OF FAITH  
— 1517-2017 —

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