

## Here I Stand

500 years ago a rebel stood up and took a stand. That rebel and his stand altered the course of religious history for the past 500 years. Of course, this rebellious, standalone historic figure was none other than our own Martin Luther. Luther challenged the religious hierarchy of his day because he had searched scripture and discovered the concept of “grace through faith” as the most relevant teaching of the faith. Now this is a brief simplification of all of Luther’s studies. But, in short, he opposed any works’ righteousness mentality that had surfaced within portions of the Roman Catholic Church of his time. His 95 theses nailed to the wooden church door are legendary. Luther took a stand, paid a price for his stand, and is today revered as a reformer who transformed theological discussion within the Christian Church for centuries.

In my lifetime I have witnessed many a protest in our democratic society. From the protests of the Vietnam War and Civil rights of the 60’s to the “Black Lives Matter” and other similar protests of today, reformers and would-be reformers have also taken their stands. Some of those reformers lost their lives because of their beliefs. We must remember our culture is one which is supportive of individual freedom and expression. A country built on independent thought and action is always ripe for the next reformer to take his or her ideals to the next level. The culture of Luther’s day was more condemning of those who might step out of line and upset the status quo, especially inside the sacred walls of the church. While Luther did not lose his life for his stance, he did lose credibility and was shamed by the majority because of his views. One wonders how many hours of mental consternation he endured before he concluded he must oppose the most powerful institution of his day, the Church of Rome.

Consequently, Luther’s stance not only created dialogue among new denominations, it also awakened the Catholic Church to react to a line of corruption within its own ranks. Today Luther stands as a symbol of standing alone in times of challenge and controversy, not comfort and convenience. He risked everything he had for what he believed and never backed down despite pressure from many a faction. No endorsements followed his stand. No book deals were waiting. No talk shows labeled him a celebrity. Luther truly was on an island. His faith bolstered ONLY by the Word of God, the words of Jesus.

As we measure and compare those who stand for higher ideals, changes in tradition, and equality for all, let us remember and note the life of Martin Luther. Let us not too quickly judge and condemn those who stand alone, but let us all measure the effort by the sacrifice made. Luther was not praised nor heralded as a great man when he first posted his theses. Time would honor him more than the peers of his day. This year we remember the man, his stance, and the changes he championed. Happy 500<sup>th</sup>.