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Reformation Day
October 26, 2025
Text: Romans 3:19 – 28
Title: Martin Who?

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. How did I ever end up here? That was the question that Martin Luther asked himself for about the hundredth time in the past hour. As the minutes marched relentlessly closer to the appointed time when he must finally give his answer to Emperor Charles V and the Papal representatives who had gathered in the city of Worms for the Imperial Diet or court, it seemed like an ever more important question to consider, How did I ever end up here?

The question caused him to reflect over the course that his life had taken from as far back as he could really remember. Born on November 10, 1483, Martin Luther was the son of Hans and Margaret Luther. When he was only a little older than four, Hans sent him to study at the Mansfeld Latin School. Although most boys started their education at the age of six, Martin showed an aptitude for his work, and Hans began to have dreams of making him into a lawyer. With his son having such an advanced education, Hans knew that he would eventually be able to depend on Martin taking care of both him and his wife in their old age when he could no longer work in the copper mines. Hans worked hard toward that goal, so hard that by the time of the year 1500, he was operating his own mines and smelting furnaces, and he had accumulated enough money to buy his own home, a true blessing for any non-nobleman in that day and age. The following year, 1501, he was finally able to send his 18-year-old son off to study law at the University in Erfurt.

Looking back, that time at university a little less than 20 years ago seemed like another world. While his father was determined to make him a lawyer, Martin now knew that God had other plans for him. He would never forget that trip as long as the Lord allowed him to live. He

was on the road back to the university after visiting his parents when the wind suddenly grew stronger, and the sky began to darken. The lightning began to flash with the distant rumblings of thunder, and he began to run for shelter that just wasn't there. The inevitable rain began to pour down upon him, as the lightning and thunder got closer and closer. Suddenly a bolt of lightning struck a nearby tree, and Martin still remembered falling to the mud and crying out at the top of his voice, "St. Anne, mother of Mary, save me! I promise, I'll become a monk!"

That was definitely not a statement to be taken lightly. He knew that to go back on his prayerful promise would send him on the road straight to hell, and so when he returned to the university he began selling off his law books. When that task was done, he held a banquet for his closest friends, and told them what he was about to do. Naturally, they tried to talk him out of it because he showed such great potential as a lawyer, but when he said that he had already sent a letter to his parents announcing that he had left the university to become a monk, they knew that there was no convincing him. He was determined to join the Augustinian Order, and on July 17, 1505, Martin Luther did just that.

His father was both devastated and furious. How could his son do such a thing to him? As Martin thought back to those first months after he became a novice, he could still hear Hans's voice saying to him, "Doesn't the Bible tell you to honor your father and mother? How are you doing that now? You've left me and your mother to look after ourselves in our old age!" The son tried to convince his father that what he had done was a good thing, and that it would be a greater benefit to his parents in the long run as he offered up regular prayers for their eternal souls. Then he told Hans again about the storm, and his father replied with a touch of scorn and a smirk, "God grant that it was not a trick of the devil."

His days as a monk were full of worship and work. The practice of the Order brought the brothers together for prayer and worship at 7 different times throughout every 24 hour period.

When he wasn't spending time in worship or sleeping, he would work at various tasks throughout the monastery: cleaning and maintaining the buildings and grounds or working in the gardens to provide food for the brothers. The rest of his time was spent in long hours of study and meditation as well as self-denial and discipline, and while he found all of this beneficial to his devotion, it did nothing to relieve him of the terror that he had when he considered his place before the judgment seat of God.

He was acutely aware that he could never be good enough or believe hard enough or confess sincerely enough to please God and earn His favor. He would spend hours in the confessional listing sin after sin, and then when he finally left, he would remember even more. He believed exactly what the Church of the day taught, that Jesus was a stern and harsh judge just waiting to punish him for any sin that he did not adequately confess. He would eventually write, "The name of Christ often frightened me, and when I looked on Him and the cross, He seemed to me like a flash of lightning. When people mentioned His name, I would rather have heard the devil mentioned. For I believed that I would have to do good works until they made Christ love and forgive me." But the harder he tried the more he realized just how sinful he was.

It wasn't until the head of his monastery also called the abbot, Father Staupitz, sent him to study the Scriptures for a doctorate in theology that Martin finally began to realize that something was wrong. All his life, he had been told that the way to salvation was through hard work to earn God's favor. He had been taught that each and every sin had to be paid for before he could enter into heaven, and if he didn't do it here, he would suffer in purgatory before he could even enter into heaven, if he had lived a life good enough to earn heaven that is.

But in his studies of the Scriptures, Luther began to realize that the Church had it wrong. They were missing the Gospel. His studies took him into the book of Romans, and he would never forget that he was reading the third chapter of that great epistle sometime during the year

1514. The words would stay with him from then on, and he would learn to cling to them in the darkest times of doubt when the memories of his past sins tormented him. “Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.” He still remembered his shock and despair when he first read that “...by works of the law no human being will be justified in His sight.” If no one could be justified by works, then who could ever be good enough to be saved!? It was utterly hopeless!

Thankfully, he kept reading, “But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God *through faith in Jesus Christ* for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and *are justified by his grace as a gift*, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, *to be received by faith*. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus...Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. For we hold that *one is justified by faith apart from works* of the law.” That was the answer! All of the time that Martin had spent agonizing over his sins and whether or not he was good enough to earn salvation was pointless. Justification and salvation were completely free gifts from God!

The relief and joy of that discovery gave him the courage and the desire to fix all of the errors that he began to discover throughout his beloved Church. He had to let the Holy Father know about the abuses that were happening in his name. Things like the selling of indulgences to convince people that they could receive the forgiveness of their sins for a price. That was why

he posted the 95 Theses or points of debate on the 31st of October in 1517, he wanted to bring these issues into the open and have the proper authorities address them. In his naïve idealism, Martin Luther never imagined that the fallout would lead him before the emperor three years later to answer the question of whether or not he would recant his own writings. And this just wasn't some question that he had to reply to. It was literally a matter of life and death because if he refused to denounce his own writings, then an execution order would be issued from the throne, and upon his return to Wittenburg, anyone could legally kill him on sight.

But that is where he was now. How did I ever end up here? He asked himself again, and that's when the answer hit him. He was here by the grace and the hand of God. He was here to bring the truth of the Gospel back to the Lord's people. Would he recant his writings? Never, not unless they could prove to him that he was wrong and use only the Word of God to do it.

The Law of God did its work on Martin Luther almost 500 years ago, just as it has done for Christians throughout history. It convicted him of his sins, and sent him in search of the Savior. It taught him just how sinful he really was, and it still does the same thing for us because "...through the law comes knowledge of sin." But unlike the agonizing struggles that Luther went through, we have the blessing of not having to go through the same thing. Because we can look at the writings of Martin Luther and the history of the Reformation, and we can take advantage of what the Lord led him to re-discover, the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Gospel that tells us that we are justified by God's grace through faith in Jesus. We give thanks to God today for the blessing that Martin Luther was to the Christian Church in his day, and we give God thanks for using him and faithful pastors and church leaders ever since to preserve that joyous Gospel for us. Amen. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.