

1 THE FREEDOM OF A CHRISTIAN 1520

Session 1

Introduction and Historical Background

2 500TH ANNIVERSARY (+1)

- 1 • Luther wrote "The Freedom of a Christian" as a treatise to summarize what it means to be Christian.
- Attached it to a formal letter to the pope of the time, Pope Leo X in a mode of reconciliation.
- Presiding Bishop Elizabeth A. Eaton asked the church to study it in 2020, the 500th anniversary.
- 2 "Luther wrote, 'Christian individuals do not live in themselves but in Christ and their neighbor.' Today, as in Luther's day, our faithful response to the uncertainty and death-dealing forces in our world is to proclaim that which is sure and life-giving for all. Freed in Christ, we resist the temptation to turn inward in despair by turning outward in love and service to the world. Siblings in Christ, rejoice! We are no longer captive, but free!"

Bishop Eaton

3 RESOURCES

- "The Freedom of a Christian 1520: The Annotated Luther Study Edition," by Timothy J. Wengert
- ELCA developed study guide, written by Rev. Dr. Carmelo Santos, director for theological diversity and ecumenical and interreligious engagement
- Case studies and more at ELCA500.org

4 OVERVIEW

- Luther believed this treatise summarized the whole Christian life.
- This study must be an affair of the heart as much as of the head.
- Key question: not "What did Luther mean when he wrote this or that" but "What does this mean for us, for me, today."

5 A NOTE ON FREEDOM

- Freedom is at the heart of this treatise, but how can we accept the gift of freedom if we don't even know that we are captive?
- And how can we recognize our captivity if we misunderstand what freedom is really about?

6 A NOTE ON FREEDOM (CONTINUED)

- So, just what is the freedom of a Christian?
- Sin is the name Christians have given to those forces keeping us captive and denying us the free and wholesome lives God wants for us.
- There is not just one way to experience the forces of sin in our lives.

7 A NOTE ON FREEDOM (CONTINUED)

- Different people experience the chains of sin in different ways:
 - Shame
 - Guilt
 - Oppression
 - Fragility
 - Self-deprecating feelings and thoughts

8 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 1517: Luther nails the 95 theses on the doors of Castle Church in Wittenberg.
- 1518: interview by Cardinal Cajetan was first of many attempts to avoid or mitigate Luther's impending condemnation by the pope and excommunication

9 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND (CONTINUED)

- 1520: Karl von Miltitz was one who tried to find ways around the impasse—gave Luther instructions to write a reconciliation-minded letter to Pope Leo X (1475-1521).
- Compared to other tracts he wrote in 1520, *Freedom* strikes a remarkably temperate tone.

10 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND—PRINTING ISSUES

- Luther completed both the letter and the treatise in September 1520
- But, because the letter to Leo X arrived at the printer first, and the printer knew a hit when he saw it, he went ahead and printed it.
- Versions in Latin and German led to differences

11 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND—PRINTING HISTORY

- "Freedom" was an instant bestseller: between 1520 and 1526 there were 30 printings (19 in German, 1 in a German dialect, 8 in Latin and several translations)
- Luther sent a corrected copy to a cathedral canon in Augsburg, who forwarded it to printer Adam Petri in Basel.

12 HOMEWORK FOR NEXT WEEK....

- Read handout called "Appendix 4: Synopsis of *The Freedom of a Christian*"
- Available as a handout
- Available as a link on "Digital News in the Pews"