

# A Reformation Reunion: *On the 500th Anniversary of the Protestant Reformation*

**Cast:** (in order of appearance)

**Martin Luther**

**Katie (Katharina von Bora) Luther**

**Argula (von Stauffer) von Grumbach**

**Ulrich Zwingli**

**John Calvin**

*(Martin and Katie walk in from the back of the sanctuary, arm in arm, talking with each other)*

Martin: My dear Katie, I can hardly believe it has been so long since we walked this earth.

Katie: Yes, Martin, it has been a very long time. Do you remember when we met?

Martin: Oh ja! You were one of a dozen girls from the cloister at Nimbschen, there since you were 5 years old, given up by your father. Poor little Katharina von Bora. I saved you from that wretched place! And you became my bright *Morning Star of Wittenberg!*

Katie: Now Martin, it really wasn't that bad. But I, like many girls in that time, had been forced into the convent, at no choice of my own. We escaped the night before Easter hiding in a covered wagon in a bunch of smelly herring barrels. You could have found a better way to free us Martin! Then later, forsaking our vows as nuns, you found husbands for us. Many to priests! And I was the last one. You finally gave in to my demands and married me!

Martin: Ja, I just felt sorry for you. Didn't want you to have to marry some old geezer!

Katie: And do you know why we are here in this beautiful church today?

Martin: Of course my dear Kate, it is in a way, my birthday! Ja?! Oh, I am so excited! People all around the world are thinking of *me* and all that I did and celebrating the *Protestant Reformation*, the reform of the church, which *I* started!

Katie: Yes Martin, we all know that it was on that day, *October 31, 1517*, that you nailed your 95 theses to the door of the Wittenberg Castle Church, and the great Protestant Reformation began!

Martin: Ah ja, I remember it well! It was a Saturday, I believe. All hallows eve! I had planned it that the people would see my paper on the door as they came to church on Sunday morning. It was *All Saints Day*, at *All Saints Church*. Clever, don't you think?!

Katie: Yes Martin, you are so clever!

Martin: I never expected it all to go as it did. I was an ordained priest, a professor at the new university at Wittenberg. I never intended to break off from the Roman Catholic Church. Only to correct its errors. My posting of the 95 theses on the door was the common practice of those wanting to engage others in discussion about an issue and so that is what I did. I had also sent a copy of my "Disputation of Martin Luther on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences," to Albrecht, our Archbishop, protesting against the sale of indulgences.

Katie: Oh yes, I remember the story of how it all began (I heard him tell it hundreds of times to visitors to our home). How that Dominican monk, Johann Tetzel, got you all upset!

Martin: Ya, that Tetzel, he had been sent to Germany from Rome, to raise money for the building of the great St. Peter's Basilica. He did it by selling indulgences. That is, taking money in exchange for time off from purgatory - for oneself, or even for loved ones who had passed on! He had a little jingle that he'd say: "*As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs.*" Horse...poopy! The idea that one could buy their way to heaven was ludicrous and more importantly, *not found anywhere in scripture!* Besides that, there were many things that the church and the Pope were doing that did not seem correct, and I wanted to address those problems.

Katie: You did Martin, through your books and tracts that you wrote. Soon after you first wrote your 95 theses, your friends had them printed, and like wildfire, your teachings blazed across the continent! People were so hungry for what you were saying. Then, you had many meetings with the Roman Church leaders!

Martin: Ja, they wanted me to recant of my writings. The major things I was asserting were, ***sola scriptura, sola fide, sola gratia and the priesthood of all believers .***

Sola scriptura means *by scripture alone!* What we believe must be found in scripture and not disputed by scripture. I argued that some Catholic traditions and beliefs, such as *purgatory, papal authority, penance, and the sale of indulgences,* were not supported by scripture and thus should *not* be teachings of the Church!

Katie: ***Sola fide*** means that we find **justification by faith alone!** There is nothing we can do to earn our way to salvation. We cannot buy it with money, we cannot earn it by good works. It is only by faith in God through Jesus Christ that we know God's salvation.

Martin: ***Sola gratia*** means *by grace alone!* God's free grace is extended to all. And lest we claim any role in our own salvation, we understand that even our *faith* is a gift from God. It is *by grace, through faith,* that we are saved.

Katie: ***The Priesthood of All Believers!*** Scripture tells us that each and every child of God, each one of us is given a direct line to God, that we need no mediator, no priest to intervene for us. Each Christian is indeed a priest him or herself and likewise, we are each called to priestly work. The plowboy and the milkmaid do priestly work. In fact, their plowing and milking *is* priestly work. There is no hierarchy where the priesthood is a "vocation" and milking the cow is not. Both are tasks that God calls his followers to do, each according to their gifts.

Martin: Remember Katie, when I was called to the Diet of Worms? (oh, and that's a meeting, not something you eat!). They said I must recant all I had written. I said to them, "*Unless I am convinced by scripture and plain reason - I cannot accept the authority of popes and councils because they have contradicted each other - my conscience is captive to the word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. Here I stand. I can do no other.*"

***(Ulrich Zwingli, John Calvin and Argula von Grumbach, enter from the back)***

Ulrich: Pardon! Excusez-moi! I am **Ulrich Zwingli** the great reformer from Zurich! And our friends, **Argula von Grumbach** of Bavaria, and **John Calvin** . . . *(cut off by Calvin)*

John: Oh, oui, oui! I am *sure* they know who **I** am, the *great* reformer of Geneva!

Ulrich: Ja, ja, ja, Martin, we've heard that story over and over and over! You were excommunicated from the Roman Church and you started this whole thing called the *Protestant Reformation*. But Martin, you didn't do it alone! It was not ***Sola Luther!***

Argula: No, you didn't do it alone! Without that woman standing beside you, you would have done nothing! Katharina, you were amazing and few have given you any credit for all you did. You ran your household which was an old monastery and raised 6 children (2 of which died before they were teenagers), and took in numerous orphans and other strays that your husband would bring home - students from the university, poor people who just needed a place to stay, some of Martin's neices and nephews, and other family - you might as well have been running a boarding house! You dear woman took care of everything, the meals, housekeeping, bookkeeping, laundry, overseeing the staff. You even turned your home into a hospital when the plague broke out in Wittenberg. You bought lands, ran farms, milking cows and planted huge gardens. You were a true business woman!

Martin: Ja! And she brewed the best tasting beer in Wittenberg! Few women could compare with you my dear Lord Kate!

Katie: But you Argula von Grumbach, you were able to speak your truth! For a woman, that was unheard of!

Argula: Yes, there were a few of us who were allowed to speak out, like I did at the Diets of Augsburg and Nuremberg. I had read Luther and defended those ideas in my own treatises that were widely distributed. Martin, you yourself said that I knew more than all the "red hats" in Rome (the canon lawyers and Cardinals). But most women were relegated to the home.

John: Excusez-moi. I did believe, and still do, that a woman's place, is in the home, to care for and raise the children in a Christian environment.

Katie: Oh John, you are such a stuffed shirt and *blind!* The world needs women speaking up! Argula, go up to that pulpit and try it out!

***(Argula climbs up to the pulpit)***

Argula: Oh, this isn't so bad! You know, of all the Protestant groups, only the Anabaptists allowed women to preach. And then you closed down the convents, which were the only places where women could have lives fully committed to the faith. Martin, you men all made a grave mistake by keeping women from leadership. No, Martin, you didn't do it alone, *and* you could have done it *better!*  
***(Argula returns to the floor with the others)***

Ulrich: Ja Martin! You didn't do it alone. There were many factors that made the Reformation possible. So let's go back just a bit and remember all the things that led up to this point in history.

Ulrich: In the 14th century, we had the **Western Schism**. The Roman Catholic Church had 3 Popes all at one time! The church was split into Eastern and Western Churches. Faith in the papacy began to erode.

Katie: Also in the 14th century the **Black Death** had killed *hundreds of millions* throughout Europe and it kept popping up even in our time. The loss of up to 50% of the population in some areas affected everything, including the Church. People were afraid and wondered why God was so angry with them. Lack of understanding led to blaming the Jews and whole Jewish communities were annihilated.

John: There was corruption in the **Roman Curia**. Popes and Cardinals and other leaders were lining their pockets with the wealth of the Church, at the expense of the poor. Though priests were supposed to be celibate, many fathered children, and kept housemaids who served as wives to them. People had less faith in these hypocritical religious leaders.

Argula: It was the beginning of the **Renaissance**, a rebirth of classical Greek philosophy. Great changes came through the arts, painting, sculpture, architecture, politics, literature, mathematics and science. Copernicus told us we were *not* the center of the universe and geographic discoveries led to a mapping of the globe!

Ulrich: **Humanist thought** emphasized the value and agency of humanity and great thinkers like my friend, the priest, Erasmus, who sought a "*middle road*" between us Protestants and the Roman Church, and who published the first Greek New Testament, had a "*rationalistic approach*" to scripture, and led to an emphasis on "*pure scholarship*" within the church.

Martin: The invention of the **printing press** by Johannes Gutenberg of Germany in 1440, allowed for the distribution of information and literature at a much greater pace and ushered in the era of mass communication.

Argula: Increased literacy, movement to the cities and other factors led to the development of the **middle class** in many nations.

Katie: The **Turkish Ottoman Empire** was knocking on the eastern edge of the Holy Roman Empire. Our young men were constantly being taken away to war!

John: The rise in **nationalism**. Always a danger. Beware!

Ulrich: And don't forget those brave souls who gave themselves for the sake of reform long before you or I came along! **Peter Waldo** who founded the Waldensians in the 12th century, with their emphasis on simplicity of preaching and living; the Englishman **John Wyclif** who helped translate the Bible into English for the common person to read; and the Bohemian, **Jon Hus**, who preached against the corruption and superstitions he found in the medieval Church, and who was burned at the stake as a heretic!

Ulrich: All these things paved the way for us, Martin, to bring about the enormous changes that we made. And as you well know, even *we* did not agree on all things!

Martin: Ja, you and your friends there in Zurich, Switzerland, were making many changes, while I was having unfruitful discussions with the Roman Church. But we made changes too! I translated the Bible from Latin to German. Thousands of Bibles were soon printed and common people were reading the scripture for themselves! We closed down the cloisters and encouraged priests to marry; we put more emphasis on the reading of scripture and preaching the word; and we sang hymns to the tunes the common person knew (often bar songs!). We stressed faith and love but allowed freedom in secondary issues, like eating meat on Fridays and venerating images.

Ulrich: Ja, in Zurich, we took things a bit further than you did Martin.

Martin: A bit too far, I'd say!

Ulrich: We sought to rid the church of its iconography, removing pictures and statues in the churches. We forbade pilgrimages, closed the monasteries, and diverted funds that had supported the Great Minster Church, and established a Theological school as well as a hospital for the poor. We replaced the Latin mass with my more simplistic liturgies in the language of the people, shuttered up the organs and ended congregational singing . . .

Martin: A real *blasphemy!*

Ulrich: We took away the Eucharistic candles and incense, stopped wearing priestly vestments and wore the academic robes instead. We sought a simplicity in the liturgy with an emphasis on the *spoken word*.

John: When I moved to Switzerland (they were *killing* the Protestants in France!), I wrote my renowned *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Many were influenced by my thoughts. In my congregations, we sang the Psalms (*without* accompaniment!), and I wrote my *Geneva Psalter* . . .

Martin: I never understood your trouble with instruments. Both of you! Such a fine musician as yourself, Ulrich, and John, we see support for musical accompaniment in scripture, in the *Psalms* themselves!

John: Yes, well, and in 1538, Geneva adopted my *Ecclesiastical Ordinances*, which provided the basic structural re-organization of the church, based on the model found in the New Testament - pastors, teachers, elders and deacons. This structure would later be used by the Pilgrims, Puritans, Congregationalists, Primitive Baptists, Presbyterians, Reformed, and your own United Church of Christ! We would have a *disciplined* church, and would work alongside the state magistrates. We forbade gambling, dancing, and excessive drinking . . .

Katie: John definitely was *not* the life of the party! As my husband would often say, "*Beer is made by men, wine by God!*"

John: Would you please stop interrupting me?! Now where was I? We punished those guilty of not attending church regularly, using profanity, drunkenness, adultery, wife beating, and so on. We had a very high doctrine of God and a very low view of humanity - "*total depravity*" is what I called it. I taught *predestination* and *particular atonement* - only the *elect* are saved. "*Once saved, always saved.*"

Martin: So, we really did have an impact on our world!

Ulrich: Ja, but it wasn't all good you know. So much killing, so many wars! **Religious persecution** - executions, burnings at the stake, torture - resulted in refugees fleeing for their lives; the **Peasants War** that killed over 100,000 in Germany alone; the many **Religious Wars** between the Catholics and Protestant states, like the one in which I was killed (my poor wife lost not only me, but her brother, brother-in-law, our son and son-in-law, *all in one day!*); and the **Thirty Years' War** - that ended in 1648. One of the longest and most destructive conflicts in human history, resulting in **8 million casualties!**

Argula: And the division this all caused. So many failed attempts to reunite, not only with the Catholics, but with the Protestant groups themselves. And of all things, you *separated* yourselves over your various interpretations of the *Lord's Supper!*

Katie: And the anti-Semitism that we fostered. It was a great sin. Even worse, some of Martin's writings were later used in the 20th century to support the Holocaust and others who would persecute the Jewish people.

Ulrich: And the Church is *still divided*, not united as Christ intended when he prayed that his followers "*would all be one!*"

John: But we did leave *some* good in our wake, did we not? Certainly we had a major impact on the **religious and philosophical** thought of our time. We confronted a corrupt institution in the Catholic Church, which ultimately initiated many changes within itself.

Martin: We put the scriptures in the hands of the common people to read and learn from and stressed the importance of **education and literacy** among our people.

Ulrich: It was the Reformation that prepared the way for the **Enlightenment** by maintaining that *faith and reason* remain alongside each other. It established **freedoms**, like the right and obligation of individual conscience, the freedom of religion, the freedom of opinion, and helped establish the foundations for **democratic** governance.

John: We ushered in the idea of the "**Protestant work ethic**" which some say led to the concept of economic **capitalism**.

Katie: It **inspired movements** like Women's Suffrage and the abolition of slavery!

Martin: Ja, I think we did what we could. We certainly gave fully of ourselves and endured a difficult time in history. And this time together *today*, has been a wonderful *reunion!* I am so glad we could all be here. Any last words before we must go?

*(All look at each other, contemplating what to say)*

Ulrich: May God be the center of all you do, and the Bible the cornerstone of all your living!

Argula: We must all continue to watch over, pray and *speak up* for the Church - for *all* of its people!

John: *Work hard!* For the world needs you now more than ever!

Katie: Support each other in that work. Let *love and devotion* be your guides.

Martin: And may you continue in the *reforming* of God's Church! Remembering your own words, that "*God is still speaking!*" May you endeavor to keep *listening!* You know, I once said, "*Next to the word of God, the noble art of music is the greatest treasure in the world.*" So how about we sing a song. My new friend up at the organ, Anne, would you lead us in one of my very own, "*A Mighty Fortress is Our God.*" Let us stand and sing it *boldly!*

*(After the first verse, the characters walk out together, singing as they go)*