

Mike's message

Reformation 500

This year is the 500th Anniversary of The Reformation, the period in history that saw enormous changes in the life of the church and wider society.

In English minds The Reformation is often associated with King Henry VIII (1491 - 1547) and his break with Rome over marriage to Anne Boleyn in 1534. But a tide of reform was already washing over European churches. Henry was initially on the side of the Pope who, in 1521, declared Henry to be 'Defender of the Faith'. Henry was given this title to reward him for a document he wrote called "Defence of the Seven Sacraments". In it Henry criticised those who were attacking the theology of the Roman Church. Among those was the German theologian Martin Luther (1483 - 1546) and it's an action of Luther's that we are recalling on it's 500th Anniversary.



On 31st October 1517 Martin Luther nailed a document to the door of All Saints' Church, Wittenburg. The document, "The 95 Theses", criticised elements of (then) Roman Catholic thinking notably the "selling of indulgences". This was an idea that donations to the Church would ensure the giver had, following their death, a speedier entrance to heaven. It implied that "good works" were necessary to ensure salvation rather than "justification by faith alone". Luther's protest was the catalyst that started the greatest political and religious upheaval Europe has ever seen. Those that protested against Rome and it's teaching would become known as Protestants. But it would also lead to a root and branch reform of the Roman Catholic Church itself - known as the Counter Reformation.

In reality The Reformation is much more complex than a tiff between Luther and the Pope. It was a period that stretched over more than a century. At the death of Henry VIII the church in England had changed little, with services still in Latin for example. It would take the reigns of Edward VI, Mary and Elizabeth until a distinctive Church of England emerged. Church leaders such as the Scot John Knox (1513 - 1572) were also influential. Knox was influenced by John Calvin (1509 - 1564) in Geneva and, on return to Scotland, started the ball moving that would lead to establishing the Presbyterian Church.

Change is constant and necessary. In time the Church of England would change further and from within it, two hundred years later, would emerge Methodism. The Presbyterian Church would also see many changes and, just a few decades ago, would in England join with other churches to form the United Reformed Church.

At The Cotteridge Church we represent a coming together of three reformed churches - each of those three themselves a drawing together of different traditions. We are a living sign that God's people are always changing through the life of the Holy Spirit dwelling within us.

You can find out more about Reformation 500 at: www.reformation500.uk

