

# Sermon Series – Reformation 500 Themes

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## *God's Gift of Marriage*

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### **Text: Proverbs 31:10-31**

<sup>10</sup> An excellent wife who can find?  
She is far more precious than jewels.  
<sup>11</sup>The heart of her husband trusts in her,  
and he will have no lack of gain.  
<sup>12</sup>She does him good, and not harm,  
all the days of her life.  
<sup>13</sup>She seeks wool and flax,  
and works with willing hands.  
<sup>14</sup>She is like the ships of the merchant;  
she brings her food from afar.  
<sup>15</sup>She rises while it is yet night  
and provides food for her household  
and portions for her maidens.  
<sup>16</sup>She considers a field and buys it;  
with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard.  
<sup>17</sup>She dresses herself with strength  
and makes her arms strong.  
<sup>18</sup>She perceives that her merchandise is profitable.  
Her lamp does not go out at night.  
<sup>19</sup>She puts her hands to the distaff,  
and her hands hold the spindle.  
<sup>20</sup>She opens her hand to the poor  
and reaches out her hands to the needy.  
<sup>21</sup>She is not afraid of snow for her household,  
for all her household are clothed in scarlet.  
<sup>22</sup>She makes bed coverings for herself;  
her clothing is fine linen and purple.  
<sup>23</sup>Her husband is known in the gates  
when he sits among the elders of the land.  
<sup>24</sup>She makes linen garments and sells them;  
she delivers sashes to the merchant.  
<sup>25</sup>Strength and dignity are her clothing,  
and she laughs at the time to come.  
<sup>26</sup>She opens her mouth with wisdom,  
and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.  
<sup>27</sup>She looks well to the ways of her household  
and does not eat the bread of idleness.  
<sup>28</sup>Her children rise up and call her blessed;  
her husband also, and he praises her:



<sup>29</sup>“Many women have done excellently,  
but you surpass them all.”

<sup>30</sup>Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain,  
but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.

<sup>31</sup>Give her of the fruit of her hands,  
and let her works praise her in the gates.

### **Theme: Katharina von Bora – a Woman who Feared the Lord**

As I have been looking at Reformation themes, I’ve looked a lot at the life and thought of Martin Luther. But he did not stand alone in this life. He had many colleagues and princes who stood beside him, but probably most important of all was a gift that he never expected to receive, his dear wife Katharina von Bora. When you look at her life, this proverb fits perfectly. It is almost describing this remarkable woman who feared the Lord.

#### **I. Who was Katharina von Bora?**

There is a problem that we have with regard to both Martin and Katie Luther. No one wrote a biography of them during their lifetimes. Most of the things that we know about Katie are from letters that Luther wrote to his wife. For hundreds of years after the Reformation, she was almost forgotten, but today there is a renewed interest in learning about her life.

We are not exactly sure when she was born. It was probably in the year 1499. Her family was nobility, but they were poor. When she was very young, her mother died. She was brought to a convent, and her father remarried. We know very little about her time at the convent, except for two things. She had two aunts who were nuns at the same convent, and somehow some of Luther’s tracts were being smuggled into the convent.

In 1523 Martin Luther helped to arrange the escape of 12 nuns with the help of a man named Leonhard Köppe. After delivering herring on Easter Eve, the nuns hid in his wagon. They arrived at Wittenberg, and Luther was able to find wives for most of the women very quickly. But Katie was a problem. The family of the first man whom she was to marry was opposed to their son marrying an escaped nun, and she lost all contact with him. She didn’t like the second man who was suggested. After 2 years, she told Luther that she would only marry Luther or his friend Philip von Amsdorf, Luther apparently told this to his father as a joke. Probably to his surprise, his father relished the thought of grandchildren, and encouraged his son to propose to the woman.

They were married in a small ceremony, and many of Luther’s friends and colleagues were not happy. At first they were not comfortable with each other. They were both strong-willed, and as a former monk and nun, they were not used to company from the other sex. Luther would write that it took a while to get used to pig tails on the pillow next to him.

But there was a wonderful bond that grew between the two of them. Luther was often gone on business. Whenever he heard that someone was going back to Wittenberg, he would take the time to pen a heartfelt letter to his wife. They could poke fun at each other. He had many nicknames for her, including “My Rib” and “My Lord,” and he turned her name “Katie” into “Kette,” which

means my chain. Their family was full of a lot of joy and singing. You might remember that Luther's Christmas hymn "From Heaven Above" was actually written for his children.

Katie became a faithful wife to Luther. He was given the 40 room Black Monastery as a residence. The place was a mess. She cleaned it up and found a way to make money. She rented rooms to students and other boarders. She raised animals, grew all kinds of vegetables, and brewed beer. Our text says that the wife considers a field and buys it. She did just that. She bought the Zuhlsdorf farm outside of Wittenberg and ran it. Luther would go through severe bouts of depression. She would help him through those times. There is a story that she once dressed in black. Luther asked, "Who died?" Her answer was that God must have because Luther was so depressed. He got the point, and it helped him out of the depression.

Looking after a man with all of the ailments of Luther was quite the task. Their son Paul, who became a doctor, remarked that his mother was half a doctor after caring for so many ailments that their father had. She was deeply concerned for her husband. She didn't like it that he went on the final trip to Eisleben. Luther wrote back a pretty sarcastic letter that she shouldn't worry about him so much, but she was right. He died just a few days after he wrote that letter. She would often discuss theology and the situations of the day with his colleagues. He would refer to her as Lady Dr. Luther. They grieved together when they lost two of their children. The loss of their daughter Magdalena at the age of 13 was especially hard.

As in our text both her children and husband praised her. Luther's highest tribute was when he called his favorite book of the Bible, Galatians, his Katarina von Bora. He once even worried when he wrote, "**I give more credit to Katarina von Bora than to Christ who has done so much more for me.**" (Bainton, p 228) At Luther's death, he did something illegal. He willed his entire estate to his wife, which was not possible at the time.

Sadly, it didn't matter. When Luther died, the emperor attacked the Lutheran lands. Their home and farm were destroyed. She was driven to poverty, and even had to fight, so that her sons would not be taken away. A short time later she died after a wagon accident in Torgau when she was fleeing with her family from the plague in Wittenberg. It is said that at her death she confessed, "**I will cling to Christ as a burr to a coat.**"

II. Is there a forgotten woman, who has been an influence on your faith?

Katie was never very famous during her lifetime. Although I did read that when their oldest son got his first tooth, it was a national event. She was so dear to her husband and children. Yet the rest of the world soon forgot her after the death of her husband.

On this LWML Sunday, I would ask you to take a moment to think of some of the forgotten women of faith in your life. They might not have been the most famous women in the world, but God blessed you by putting that woman into your life. Maybe it was a grandmother or mother, who like Timothy's mother and grandmother brought him to faith, despite a father who had no interest in our faith. Maybe it was your wife. I remember one of our sainted members, Myrtle Stolte, whose husband was hostile to her faith. She prayed for him, and he eventually became a faithful Christian. She wrote in her son's confirmation prayer book, ""This prayer book is Don's. The Lord gave him

to us—so Dad got to be a Christian. Thanks be to God. Mom” It might have been a Sunday School teacher or Christian Day School teacher, who made a mark on your faith. Many of you remember Waldo Werning, who was a member here. His daughter Sharon was my 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade teacher. I still remember many of the songs that she taught us in school.

Today is LWML Sunday. The work of the LWML has been to joyfully share the good news of our Savior and serve the Lord with gladness. Think of these women who have feared the Lord and been a blessing to your life in Christ. As verse 31 says, *“Honor her for all that her hands have done, and let her works bring her praise at the city gate.”*

We thank God for all the faithful women like Katharina Luther. Women who trusted in our Lord, served faithfully, and taught us how to trust the Lord and walk in His ways.

Amen.

***Pastor Don Hougard  
Benediction Lutheran Church  
Milwaukee, WI  
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