What Happened When This Megachurch Pastor Stepped Into a 500-Year-Anointing

Truthfully, the only thing Bishop Kenneth Ulmer could think as he climbed the stairs to Martin Luther's pulpit was, "Don't trip."

He didn't.

Instead, the pastor of Faithful Central Bible Church in Inglewood, California, took on the persona of Luther and spoke from his heart and the Holy Spirit without any notes to guide him.

"I spoke in a first-person narrative as though I was Martin Luther. And so the whole message as with 'I,'" Ulmer says. "I did this, I did that. I began by saying, I didn't expect this to get as big as it is. I didn't expect to have a memorial 500 years later. But it was me telling his story. And I based it around what I learned was his favorite passage. As he translated the bible from Latin to German, his favorite book was the book of Psalms. And in the book of Psalms, his favorite three chapters were Psalm 32, Psalm 46 and Psalm 118. And of those three chapters, his favorite verse was Psalm 118:17, which says 'I shall not die, I shall live.'"

Ulmer was the final speaker at an international celebration of the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation called the Wittenberg 2017 Congress. He spoke in the very pulpit Luther did, in the same church where the Reformation founder had nailed his 95 Theses.

"I drew from the other psalms to deal with the different theologies that came out of it, particularly in Psalm 32 about God being the God who forgives. And then I took a bold

statement—and I honestly didn't know how I was going to go over it—I mentioned in my section about forgiveness, and I'm speaking in first person now, and I said I needed God's forgiveness and I needed God's forgiveness for the way I spoke against the Jewish community. And I don't think anybody expected me to go there. You could hear a pin drop when I got to that point," Ulmer says. "But I wanted to bring out the reality of this man, and the frailty of this man, and I said I needed God to forgive me. You know, he wrote a text called "The Jewish Lie". And so I said I needed God to forgive me for that."

The message was years in the making.

James O. Davis is founder of Cutting Edge International and the co-founder of Billion Soul Network, and helped spearhead the celebration. Three and a half years ago, Davis journeyed to Wittenberg, Germany, to book the celebration in person.

Davis' network brought in international church leaders who recommitted to spreading the Great Commission through the Finish 2030 declaration:

> *As a part of the Body of Christ, representing different church organizations, from different groups of believers from every world region, we come together to make the following commitments to FINISH the Great Commission:*
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> *We commit to FIND the rest of the unengaged, unreached people groups around the world and to engage them through denominational and organizational platforms for the purposes of cultural understanding, missional strategies, Bible translation, evangelism, church planting, and discipleship. We will strive to have a Bible in every language and a missionary presence in the remaining 3,000 unengaged, unreached people groups by 2030;*
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> *We commit to INTERCEDE throughout the entire Body of Christ for harmony in the Church, humility before Christ, healing of*

the sick, and harvest of the lost. We will study ourselves to death and pray ourselves back to life again! We will pray to know our part in God's heart and our role in God's goal. We will ask our Lord to send a sweeping, weeping, reaping revival like this world has never witnessed before;

We commit to NETWORK for synergizing and mobilizing the entire Body of Christ toward the fulfillment of the Great Commission. Even though we may have come from different streams of Christianity, we recognize all of us are in the mighty river of salvation today! We pledge to not allow our egos and logos to stop us from tying relational knots for global impact throughout the Global Church and to the ends of the earth;

We commit to INVEST our time, thoughts, talents, temples and treasures into unengaged, unreached people groups and into the Kingdom of God worldwide. We choose to not duplicate the efforts of our fellow servants and spend our God-given resources wisely. We will encourage Christ-followers everywhere to move from criticizing to complementing, from complaining to connecting and from competing with each other to completing the Great Commission together. We do not care who gets the credit as long as God gets the glory!

We commit to SEND missionaries not only to regions where the Gospel is, but into regions where the Gospel is not in order to consistently move toward the finish line. We will measure our local church's success not only by seating capacity but by the sending capacity. We have moved from the West going to the Rest to the Best around the world going to the Rest of the world. The mission field has become a mission force!

We commit to HARVEST together until the last person has heard the saving Gospel of Christ. We will motivate our leaders to run toward the finish line and mobilize our churches to grow and go and not to dry and die! We collectively cast vision to the ends of the earth and establish a goal to FINISH by 2030!

The declaration went forth on November 1 for significant reasons.

“When we were planning, we wanted November 1 because this was the first day to the finish line,” Davis says. “This is the first day of harmonizing our efforts to go out and finish the assignment. It is to me, and all the fountainheads of Christianity emerged from this little spot, and the first sermon of the Protestant Reformation was preached in that church. And so we saw this as the first day challenging the church to go out together, let’s go out and finish this together. It was a wonderful, wonderful afternoon when we were all together. We went to the house first, went from where he was, where he lived, where he died. We stood by Luther’s table when he had all the networking that he did. And then we walked together Luther Way. It was chilly. Ken can tell you it was chilly. But it was a wonderful walk together all the way to the church house. And then to go in and have church together was a very moving time. I think anybody that was there that day will never forget that moment. I’ve gotten emails since then from people saying, ‘I’ll never forget that moment at Castle Church.'”

Ulmer says the message is already going forth around the globe.

“How do I run with this mandate for me to finish in Los Angeles?” Ulmer says. “I’ve gotten emails from people all over the country also. I just got one yesterday from our friend in Fiji, There are men and women all over the world who are saying ‘I have a piece of this, I have a section of this and I want to run with this mandate in my context, in my city, in through my church.’ And so I think the idea of how this is spread is that I think that everyone left personalizing this historical event. That this began by the power of God 500 years ago, and yet here I am in the Philippines. Here I am in South Africa, here I am in Ghana, and I have a piece of this. I’m going to run this, I’m going to spread this. I’m going to

live as Martin Luther declared from that text so that I may declare the works of God.”

Ulmer continues: “Well, I made a very direct statement in our church when I came back, and when there were stories going out about me having been there. It’s that: what is our connection here? We, as African-American Charismatic Americans, wouldn’t be here in terms of the body of Christ were it not for this. This Reformation movement has not only spread around the world, but it has spread here to Inglewood, it has spread here to Los Angeles. And so the buy-in for them was, Wow, this was likened to the Gentiles coming into the body of Christ. And so the various streams of Reformation, the various streams of Christianity, [have] flowed right down to Inglewood and right down to Los Angeles, and so we are a part of this. We have a piece of it, and we have a piece of this mandate to continue to declare the works of God in our context, in our neighborhood, in the setting that God has placed us.”