



Reformation Day

October 25, 2020

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Welcome back! I cannot think of a more appropriate day than Reformation Sunday to open our doors for worship again!

Wanting to brush up on my facts about today, I checked out the History channel's website for a little background on our hero of the day: Martin Luther. He first studied law at university but soon heard the call to dedicate his life exclusively on Jesus as a monk. He taught the faithful not to fear the wrath of God but believe that faith alone would bring salvation.

As a young monk, he was sent to Rome as a delegate to the Council. As he observed the other religious leaders and their behavior, he quickly became disillusioned by the day-to-day policies and attitudes of the Catholic leaders. After he returned home, he pondered what he thought Jesus would want for the church and its followers.

In 1517, he gathered his thoughts into a document, called it "The 95 Thesis" and hung it on the front door of his church for the people to read. The main points were a condemnation of the priests' policy of selling indulgences to people as a way to assuage their guilt only to use that money to finance the building of St. Peter's, the pope has no power over Purgatory. "Papal indulgences do not remove guilt and buying those indulgences gave the people a false sense of security and endangers their salvation.

His two main beliefs—that the Bible is the central religious authority and that humans may reach salvation only by their faith and not by their deeds sparked the Protestant Reformation. In fact, in today's Gospel, Jesus explained to His followers that "the truth will make you free" and that He has declared our freedom from sin through Him. Martin Luther believed Jesus' message and trusted that salvation is available to us through His sacrificial love and not by anything we may do.

He advocated stripping away the non-essentials like a complicated hierarchy, worship of expensive statues and elaborate sanctuaries that he believed got in

the way between the faithful and God. Luther also undertook the massive task of translating the Bible from Latin into German so that everyone could read it and feel closer to God.

When I was preparing to write this sermon, I thought that there was no way that Martin Luther could have anticipated the consequences of nailing his thoughts to his church's door. Then my mind jumped to another, modern day man who also made his thoughts known to the people. Osama bin Laden claimed to have drawn up his beliefs into a manifesto that would start a war with the United States and then the terrorist pilots hammered those beliefs into the Twin Towers and the Pentagon with passenger jets. Both Luther and binLaden carried out their beliefs for religious and political reasons. These two men carefully planned out their actions and executed them with the intent to shake up their worlds.

Then - they sat back in amazement at the reaction of the people! Both of those actions set up repercussions that truly rocked the world as they knew it. The consequences were just as momentous - whereas Martin Luther was excommunicated from the Catholic Church, Osama bin Laden was excommunicated by society and exterminated. Luther's 95 Theses led to a new way of thinking of and worshipping God. bin Laden's terrorism changed the way we viewed our safety, immigration laws, and airport security measures.

The ironic twist to all of this was that these two men truly felt that they were answering the call of God! Classic examples of good vs evil.

Now, we are faced with yet another "new normal" in dealing with COVID-19. No one is safe from this virus and it has changed our outlook on working, school attendance, shopping and even worship!

In addressing our new normal, the words of Jesus in Matthew 6:34 come to mind: "So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today." In the Book of Concord, Luther himself assured us, and I am paraphrasing this, that God may let bad things happen but He only allows them to continue for a designated length of time. ¹

And as nice as it is to worship in person again, if you have opted to stay home, please don't feel guilty - we all have to follow our own instincts and take care of ourselves. The Council knows this and that is why our services are still available to you on your computer each week! I would like to take a moment here to thank

¹ Book of Concord, page 642

the Pastor and our Church Council for their diligent and thoughtful efforts in making worship possible remotely and now with this great experiment of worshipping in our beautiful sanctuary. I am so grateful for those who spent many hours of taping, editing and uploading the recorded services as well as the hard work Donna, our choir, soloists and assisting ministers put in to make our worship possible.

So, I ask you - please keep your mask on and your sense of humor intact!

Amen!