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Festival of the Reformation  
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Grace and Trinity Lutheran Churches, Wichita, KS  
John 8:31-36

*In the Name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit*

On October 31<sup>st</sup> 1517, Martin Luther nailed 95 theses to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany.

He wrote them in Latin so the common people wouldn't be bothered, but that the theologians might take interest.

His attack was against the selling of indulgences—forgiveness in turn for money.

These 95 theses were not and are not the founding document of *any* Lutheran Church.

In fact, they make for an entirely Roman Catholic document.

Have you read them? The first thesis is quite good:

1. Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, when He said “[do Penance],” willed that the whole life of believers should be repentance.

The rest, however, show that Luther hasn't quite gotten it yet.

With the 95 Theses Luther didn't intend to start a church, a movement, or even a “Reformation.”

His complaint was that forgiveness was *too easy*.

All you had to do was put a little money in the plate and all was well.

(Sure makes for an effective Stewardship campaign!)

These theses started something much bigger than Luther or his attack on indulgences intended—like it or not, they started a Reformation.

Yes, in the Reformation indulgences were addressed, and so were other side issues:

celibacy for priests,  
monastic orders (monks, nuns, and so forth),  
the sacrifice of the Mass,  
and liturgy and scripture in the common language.

However, these are all just side issues.

The real thing was the answer to Luther's question: “How can I find a gracious God?”

That is, “How am I saved?” and “Can I be sure?”

This is the essential re-discovery of the Reformation.

When God is believed to be gracious and merciful *to me*, everything else falls into place.

Even Rome knew that Heaven was a divine dance—  
a family and home of pure joy and love.

Everything the Father does glorifies the Son.

Everything the Son does is in service and love for the Father.

And the everything the Spirit says and does glorifies both Father and Son.

One divine, happy, and glorious dance.

One home of pure, uninhibited joy (Jn 8:35).

Where Rome went wrong was to consider this House of Joy something to be grasped, earned, merited, and achieved.

This House and Home were entered by offerings, by good deeds, by faithfulness.

Sounds simple enough: just give money, help your neighbor, and raise your kids in the Church.

This is what Luther set out to do (except, of course, for the kids part).

He tried to be the greatest friar he could be—

the most devoted, memorizing the most scripture, giving the most money, time, and talent.

And where'd it get him?

It drove him crazy!

“Was it enough? Can I do more? Did I make a mistake?

How can I find a gracious God?”

If you want to enter the joyous House of God, don't bet on the Law.

The Law tells you that you *aren't* in the House.

It speaks of your sin, your desire, your interest, your self-seeking and hatred for the other.

The law accuses and delivers a verdict against you.

The very words that meant to give life: “put in some money, help your neighbor, be faithful—” ended up being the death of Luther, as well as countless others.

There was no end to the money; every time you put some in, there was more needed.

Your neighbor never stopped needing help—there's always more to do.

And “be faithful”?

What's enough? How faithful? “What must I do to be saved?” (Mk 10:17)

The Law kills you with its never-ending demand for perfection.

It *enslaves* you to your failings, your sin: “Everyone who sins is a slave to sin” (Jn 8:34).

Don't try to enter the House of God by the Law.

It won't work.

That's what the Reformation re-discovered.

So how does one get in?

Well, if you want access to the Father's House, you must know the Son.

The Son lives and remains in this House—

He shares that pure joy and love with His Father and the Spirit.

Wherever the Son is, there you have Father and Spirit,

Love, peace, and joy,

Truth and *freedom* (Jn 8:32,36).

*Freedom*—

that's what the Reformation was about.

(In fact, Martin Luther wasn't actually his real name—it was Martin Ludder.

But when he discovered the freedom that comes in Christ—

And 'freedom' in Greek is *eleutheria*—

He changed his name from Ludder to *Luther: Freedom!*)

And so, the Reformation, with all of its *Solas*—

*Sola Gratia*

*Sola Fide*

*Sola Scriptura*

Grace, Faith, and Scripture *Alone*—

speaks, really, of *Christ alone*.

All theology, every Word *of God about God in service to God*,

Is Christology: Words *of Christ, about Christ, and from Christ* to you.

You can't know the Father or the Spirit without Him.

There's no "God" in general.

If you want to know God, to enter His House of truth and freedom and joy—

Then you must know the Son.

The Law can't help you here.

The Law speaks of *you: your works, your failings, your sin*.

But the Gospel—this is what the Reformation is all about.

The Gospel *brings* you in the House.

It knows nothing of your sin, your desire, your interest, or your loves and hates.

It knows only Christ *for you*.

The Gospel acquits and forgives, and delivers a pardon for you.

Sins utterly, entirely, and completely forgiven.

The Gospel is Christ delivered to you.

It's Him exchanging His place in the House for you, whose outside.

It's Him leaving His throne and taking up your flesh.

It's His dying and your living.

We call this the justification of the ungodly—  
 making whole and complete and right what was terribly wrong, broken, and imperfect.

Luther and his Reformation re-discovered the Gospel.

The Lutheran Church doesn't define itself by distinguishing itself from the Roman Catholics—  
 It defines itself by the Gospel, by the justification of the ungodly by Christ.  
 And it's this Gospel, this *freedom*, that re-forms, what's broken.

Do you think we could use a modern Reformation?  
 Reformation here and now?  
 Reformation of us?  
 A re-discovery of the Gospel, again?

Yes.  
 And always.

The House of God is where true joy resides.  
 The Son remains in this House always and forever.  
 The one who remains in the Son does so too (Jn 8:35-36).

A Christian is simply one who remains in the Son.  
 One who trusts that the Son is who He has promised to be.  
 One whom the Son has covered with Himself in Holy Baptism.

The Reformation is always going on—  
 “*Semper reformanda*” the Church says, “always reforming.”

If the Reformation really is all about the Gospel—  
 then we can't help but to always be reforming.  
 For as long as we sin and are sinners,  
 We'll have need for the Gospel, for freedom from being slaves to sin.

When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said “do Penance”, He willed that the *whole life* of  
 believers should be repentance—  
 that is, a life of confessing our inability to enter the House,  
 our constant desire to leave it,  
 and our love for self and hatred toward the other,  
 then the word of Gospel, which brings us, poor, miserable sinners, back inside.

*In the Name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit*