

The Bethany Bullet

Dated: November 2, 2010

The Bethany Bullet is a weekly capsule of worship highlights and big information that your brain may or may not have 'downloaded' from the prior Sunday. The purpose is to bolster you in faith, build you up in the key Biblical themes shared the previous Sunday in worship, to bring to mind the important issues on Bethany's plate and to broaden your awareness of opportunities of service to your Lord, your church, and your community. Tell a friend about *The Bethany Bullet!*

FROM WORSHIP:

Q & A on Reformation Day

When was the first Reformation Day, and why did it happen then?

On October 31, 1517, Dr. Martin Luther posted his Ninety-Five Theses on the doors of the Castle Church in Wittenberg.



(Those doors burned much later; today, brass doors stand in their place with the Ninety-Five Theses themselves seared into them. The pictures are of Bethany members who took a Luther/Reformation tour.)

These Theses were prepared for academic debate on the theological issues surrounding the sale

of indulgences, their efficacy and power. Luther's choice of October 31 was probably prompted by two circumstances. First, "spiritual pilgrims" were gathering in Wittenberg to adore the collection of religious relics of Frederick the Wise on All Saints' Day and thus receive an indulgence for their act of piety. Second, this population increase combined with the presence of Johann Tetzel, the Roman Catholic priest and purveyor of a "jubilee indulgences" authorized by the pope himself, in nearby Brandenburg selling said indulgences to any and all, including members of Luther's congregation and university community. The church declared that indulgences could grant forgiveness for the purchaser or even the purchaser's dearly departed. Luther entered the scene not out of a desire to change the church, let alone the world, but out of concern for those whom he served as pastor and professor. Yet, change both the church and world it did! Hence from Luther's time, this day has been observed as the beginning of the Reformation.

What is the Reformation?

The fact that the Reformation impacted life in many ways: politically, linguistically, economically, socially and artistically is true. However, the aim of the Reformers themselves and the core and heart of the Reformation was a theological movement. This was a Biblical enterprise that rediscovered the foundation of Christianity that had been obscured: the rediscovery of the doctrine of justification, that is, that we are saved by grace, through faith, apart from works, for the sake of Christ.

Why was the Reformation needed?

For centuries God's Word and the central teaching therefore, the Gospel, had been obscured, distorted and lost in many areas of the Church of Rome. False doctrine, superstition and corruption reigned in the Roman Catholic Church by the 1500's. Though sanctuaries through stained glass and statuary alike presented the message of Scripture to the faithful in attendance, the Church itself taught that salvation was a result of works and 'co-operation' with God. The Church of Rome had gone so far as to officially declare that the source of truth was Scripture, History, Tradition and Clergy. Of course, since Clergy were the interpreters of the other three, truth was not something which the average Christian could come to

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know through Bible reading, should they be blessed enough to have access to the Scripture and ability enough to read it in a language other than their daily one, but rather **truth** was simply declared 'top down.'

Tragically monks, priests, bishops, and even popes taught unbiblical doctrines such as works, indulgences and the merits of grace's distribution by the church. Ultimately people were always left to wonder if they had done enough to appease God's wrath toward sin and escape His punishment due sinners. Lost was the certainty Christ brings as well as the truth of the Gospel the Scripture declares: God in His love and mercy, grants forgiveness and salvation not because of what we do but because of what Jesus has done for us. In a very real way the church had been taken into captivity much as Israel in the days of Babylon, and God's release was needed; the Reformation was the way in which He brought the end to the Church's captivity.

Who began the Reformation?

Ultimately the Reformers would give God the credit for the restoration of the truth of the Gospel and the return to the central teaching of Christianity: justification by grace, through faith, apart from works, for the sake of Christ. In fact, **Soli Deo Gloria, SDG, To God Alone be the Glory** became one of the core cries of the Reformation. Humanly speaking, a confused and terrified young monk named Martin Luther and an ambitious pope named Leo X are at the heart of the start of the Reformation.

The monk Martin Luther, a member of the Augustinian order of the Black Cloister, lived in the monastery of Erfurt.



(Pictured is Martin Luther's room.)



(Pictured is view from Martin Luther's room.)

Luther was obsessed with the guilt of his sin and the conviction that God would have no choice but to damn him. The obsession got to the point that Luther would 'hog' the confessional and take so much time in confession that he would wear his hearers out. Father Johann Staupitz, the vicar-general of the order, noticed Luther's despondency and assigned him to become a professor of theology and a doctoral student at the new university in Wittenberg. This was not in an attempt to free himself from the troubled monk but a direct route to the Scriptures; for it was Staupitz's contention that Luther had come to "hate God" and that he needed to "eat more, sleep more and learn to love God."

In time, which itself is a gift of God and tool for God, Luther began to both lecture and preach on **St. Paul's letter to the Romans**. Passages like...

- ✠ *"The gospel is the power of God for salvation." (1:16),*
- ✠ *"The righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus." (3:22-24),*
- ✠ *"God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were sinners, Christ died for us." (5:8),*
- ✠ *"There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." (8:1)*

Such passages brought Luther to what he called his "Tower experience."

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That is, through the text of Scripture, he understood the grace of God in Christ, and it was as if “the gates of heaven were opened.” At this same time, during Luther’s ‘discovery’ of the Gospel in the text of Scripture, the pope, Leo X, was seeking to raise finances for the building of St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome.



(St. Peter’s Basilica pictured)

One of the chief ways the pope intended to raise the needed money was through the sale of jubilee indulgences. These indulgences were declared, by the pope and his emissaries, to absolve all sin and all punishment. This contradicted what Luther was reading and learning in the Scriptures and thus teaching and discussing in the classroom: salvation was not gained by works through religious acts but by grace through faith. Luther posted his questions and the apparent contradictions of the teaching of indulgences in the Ninety-Five Theses. While meant for in-house academic debate, the theses started a firestorm. The reason for the storm instead of discussion was the recent invention of ‘moveable type.’ Within weeks the Theses were mass produced and even translated into German. Not only students would be discussing the implications, so would the local political rulers, the laity and those in the Roman Church who sold and affirmed the teaching of indulgences and works. The reason that the posting of the Theses caused such chaos was the fact that ultimately by challenging the notion of indulgences Luther was unwittingly challenging the authority of the pope. Luther, in stating that the Scripture opposed the doctrine of indulgences and works, was elevating the Scripture over the papacy. In short order Luther was declared to be a heretic. Within a year he was summonsed to an imperial diet in Augsburg by the emperor and the pope, though political events required the assistance

of Prince Fredrick the Wise of Saxony, Luther’s benefactor and friend. Thus Luther was given safe passage to and from the diet, which proved to be a blessed thing as at the debate he declared that “popes and councils can err.” With that one sentence, the Reformation dye was cast; Luther, a Roman Catholic monk and Professor of Theology, had just said publicly that the pope was wrong!

Within a few years, Luther would be excommunicated and summoned to an additional diet in Worms where, when told to recant or else, he would say, “unless shown by Scripture and clear reason where I am wrong, I cannot and will not recant. Here I stand. God help me.”



(The building in which this took place is no longer standing, but those are PK’s and other Bethany members feet standing on the plaque that bears witness to that great moment and confession.)

God did help him, as did Prince Fredrick who had Luther kidnapped for safekeeping and held in Wartburg Castle.



(Wartburg Castle pictured)

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While a resident, Luther would translate the Bible into the German language as well as produce many writings on topics of the faith and state of the church. Within a decade and a half, the events that began with the posting of a few pages worth of thoughts regarding indulgences on October 31, 1517 had changed the world. On June 25, 1530, the Reformers along with the German princes would present the [Augsburg Confession](#) (*click on link to read more on the Augsburg Confession*) formed by Martin Luther and his fellow reformers' theology and penned by his colleague Philip Melancthon. As a result, the Lutheran Church was born.

Why are the pastors' stoles and altar cloth red on Reformation Sunday, and where on our campus is there a constant reminder of the truth and events of the Reformation?

When you walk into the sanctuary on Reformation Sunday you'll notice the chancel and clergy, and maybe even some worshippers, adorned in red. This is the same color that is used for the celebration of Pentecost and for good reason; red is the color of Reformation Sunday out of the conviction that the Spirit, who moved the first disciples to go and share the Good News and thus gave birth to the church, was also at work through the Reformers restoring the Good News and giving birth to the church anew. Of course, you don't need to wait till October 31 to see signs of the Reformation in our sanctuary. Every time you walk into the Narthex of Bethany, you pass by a reminder of the truth of the Reformation in the image known as "Luther's Seal." (Link: [Explanation of Luther's Seal](#))



(Luther's Seal in Bethany's Narthex pictured)

-Pastor Kevin Kritzer