

*Pastor Jana Schofield*  
*Christ Lutheran Church, Ferndale, WA*  
*Reformation Sunday*  
*October 30, 2022*  
*Romans 3:19-28; John 8:31-36*

Every year around this time I pull out and page through my books from seminary about the Reformation. I get a little nostalgic remembering visits to the historical sites of the Protestant Reformation in Germany. I think about and give thanks for the tremendous impact that Martin Luther had on the church as well as Western civilization.

But this year something new hit me as I was preparing for Reformation Sunday. And to be honest I'm a little embarrassed admitting this, because perhaps it might be very obvious to you. You probably recall that the reason Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the Castle Church door in Wittenberg, Germany on October 31, 1517 was because it was All Hallows Eve, the night before All Saints Sunday when mourners, people in mourning, would be coming to worship to remember those who had died.

Well, that was the part that finally hit me this year – it was mourners, it was people in grief, who first read Luther's famous words on November 1<sup>st</sup> on the threshold of the church. It was people who were broken, people whose souls were heavy with loss and sadness. And they were doubly grieving because at the time the church warned that unless you bought indulgences to release them from sin, those dead relatives you were coming to church to remember would be in purgatory, that imaginary space between heaven and hell.

So think of how freeing it must have been for those grieving and fearful mourners to read words like these:

Thesis 27: They preach only *human* doctrines who say that as soon as the money clinks into the money chest, the soul flies out of purgatory.

Thesis 36: Any truly repentant Christian has a right to full remission of penalty and guilt, even without indulgence letters.

Thesis 42: Christians are to be taught that [the one] who gives to the poor or lends to the needy does a better deed than [those] who [buy] indulgences.

Thesis 62: The true treasure of the church is the most holy gospel of the glory and grace of God.

In those words of the 95 theses, grieving people were freed from thinking that they had to pay money to purchase indulgences to release their dead relatives from purgatory. Imagine how comforting it was to read that both they and their loved ones had a right to the full remission of penalty and guilt, that giving to the poor was a better deed than buying indulgences, that the grace of God—the free forgiveness, acceptance, and mercy of God—was the true treasure of the church available to them right then and there as a free gift. They were loved by God. They and the loved ones they were coming to church to remember were free. God met those mourners at the threshold of the Castle Church in their brokenness and offered peace to their grieving souls.

Now I don't know how each of you came to church today, but I imagine that some of you are also coming with souls that are heavy with grief and sadness. Next Sunday is when we will be celebrating All Saints Sunday to remember our loved ones who have died, but even today your soul might feel tender because you are grieving the loss of someone or something dear to you. You too might be showing up today in mourning.

I know that all of us come here today estranged because of sin—Jesus says so in the gospel: everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin and does not have a permanent place in the household. Our sin—the things we do or fail to do that keep us from loving ourselves and others, keep us from serving others, keep us from seeing one another and strangers (and even people who vote differently than we do) as equally beloved children of God—that sin that curves our heart in on itself estranges us from God.

We're no different from those Germans who showed up broken on the threshold of the Castle Church door on October 31, 1517.

Well today find ourselves at another threshold—our sadness and sin holding us on one side, and Jesus on the other. We find ourselves on the threshold of estrangement unable to make it through the doorway on our own.

Well, the whole point of the gospel and the Reformation is that it's at this threshold that Jesus, who does have a permanent place in the household of God, invites us over the threshold to live with him, to experience freedom, to be assured of eternal life as well as life on this side of death. In water, word, wine, and wheat Jesus meets us in our brokenness—whether that brokenness is due to sin or grief or sadness or just plain exhaustion.

And Jesus says, “you who have fallen short of the glory of God...you who feel convicted and accused...you who don't feel that you are worthy enough...you are now justified by my grace as a gift. You are made right with God because of my choice to free you and place you in the household of God. There's nothing you have to do to acquire my grace because in your baptism you have already received it.”

Shewanie, today you will be baptized and assured of that grace in the physical touch of water and oil and the light of a candle. Today in your baptism you will step through a threshold to live alongside Jesus forever. Today you will receive the presence of the Holy Spirit who guides you and promises that nothing will ever separate you from the love of God.

My dear friends in Christ, if nothing else, I hope you understand this truth of the gospel that Luther uncovered during the Reformation: You are saved by grace. In baptism you have been brought over the threshold by Jesus to live in the household of God. You are loved by God unconditionally...you are guided by God continually...and you are never, ever alone.

When you come to church, you won't see 95 Theses nailed to the church door, but what you will see and experience as you cross over the threshold is God meeting you in your brokenness, releasing you from the estrangement of sin, and walking with you forever. You, beloved child of God, on this Reformation Sunday and every day, are free. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Open Space – including Stephen Ministry prayer station in the back

Candles, font, labyrinth, talk with me, submit a prayer, visit the art station or bible station

**Offering;** We'll end with the song Listen God is Calling