



Reformation Sunday Reflection

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On this Reformation Sunday, and in nailing those discussion points—those 95 theses—to the church door, Luther was essentially doing the medieval equivalent of social media, putting some thoughts out there for somebody—anybody—to see, in the hopes of prompting debate and discussion. And, well, it worked.

Rev. Teri Thomas¹ says, “We could go into a detailed and lengthy lesson on the history of the times, but today I want to suggest just one simple, basic reason for why the Protestant Reformation happened. I think, at its root, the Protestant Reformation happened because individual Christians in the 16th century took seriously what it means to be Christian. They took the Gospel seriously.”

I also believe that if we take seriously what it means to be Christian, if we take the Gospel seriously in the 21st century, we too will start a reformation. Our reformation may not be THE Protestant reformation. Our reformation may not result in a new denomination named after us. But our reformation, even if affects only one other person, or perhaps only our congregation, is reformation nonetheless. Reformation Sunday challenges each one of us to say, “Martin Luther started a reformation. And so will we.”

I hear you thinking to yourselves, oh come on, “I’m no Martin Luther.” Frankly, that may be good news in and of itself. It’s true, Luther was an incredibly gifted, powerfully compelling figure. He was able to compose hymns, translate Bibles, teach seminary classes, and produce an astonishing array of books and pamphlets. But Luther, for all of his accomplishments, was still just a regular person. History tells us that Luther could on occasion get very profane and use all the available German curse words. He loved to drink good beer, and he was also very human in his weaknesses. He could be judgmental, especially about people who disagreed with him. His anti-Semitic

¹ <https://www.northminster-indy.org/sermon/reformation-sunday/>

outbursts are well-known. He suffered from depression and would lock himself in his room for days at a time. But in the end, what mattered was that Luther was a person who took the Gospel seriously, not knowing where that would lead him.

Jesus called Luther to love God with all his being. Jesus calls us to follow him, to give our whole lives to him, to be reformed by him and in turn to reform others, not just on Sunday mornings, or on our good days, or on days when there's nothing pressing on our calendars. Jesus calls us into a whole new way of life, a way of life that entails risks, a way of life that has consequences—a way of life that is reformed and always reforming.

Reforming isn't easy. Following Jesus isn't easy. It wasn't easy for Luther, who all his life wondered if he was doing the right thing and questioned whether he was worthy of God's mercy. So what does being reformed and always reforming mean for us?

As Anna Case-Winters, a theologian at McCormick Seminary in Chicago, says, "Our Reformed motto, rightly understood, challenges both the conservative and the liberal impulses that characterize our diverse church today. It does not bless either preservation for preservation's sake or change for change's sake...The Reformers believed the church had become corrupt, so change was needed. But it was a change in the interest of preservation and restoration of more authentic faith and life—a church reformed and always to be reformed..."²

If we are trying to preserve and restore a more authentic faith and life, perhaps then means that we are living our church life at a time when reformation is called for. When we are called to honestly examine the life of the church, this church and the broader one, and ask: what aspects of our Reformed heritage are life-giving, and which aspects need their own Reformation? This is both exciting and scary. But our reformation means putting aside that fear, and instead embracing what Jesus and the Gospel demand of us.

Our reformation compels us to reply to Jesus, with all our heart, all our mind, and all our soul. And to love our neighbor, perhaps even more than ourselves.

Our reformation means loving God enough to risk, loving our neighbor enough to share.

² Anna Case-Winters, <http://www.pcusa.org/today/believe/past/may04/reformed.htm>

Our reformation means that we take the wisdom of the past and use it to reform the future.

Our reformation means that we invite more authenticity into our worship, our fellowship, our education.

Our reformation may mean that we think differently about the church building, and ask where its uses, its purpose, its mission, may be reformed.

Our reformation may mean doing more with less, and it might mean doing less with more.

Our reformation means acknowledging that Jesus—and no one else, not status, not job, not material riches, not the acclaim of our peers—is the Lord of our life.

When ordinary people love with heart and mind and soul, ordinary people go on to do extraordinary things. Ordinary people like Martin Luther – like me and like you. What is your reformation today? What is ours? May it be so, this day and always. Amen.