

Sermon for Reformation Sunday, October 26, 2025

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Introduction: The Hammer That Changed History

On October 31, 1517, Martin Luther, a young Augustinian monk, nailed a document with the 95 Theses to the Castle Church door in Wittenberg. This act was a scholarly challenge to address the abuses of his time, particularly the sale of indulgences, the belief that salvation or exemption from purgatory could be bought. However, the sound of the hammer resonated across Europe and across centuries, becoming the rallying cry of the Protestant Reformation. This movement promoted the Gospel rather than opposing the Church. Luther aimed not to create a new religion but to reform the Church by returning it to Christ and the core teachings of the Word of God. He held that the Church had deviated from the simplicity and truth of the Gospel. His efforts were grounded in Scripture, especially Romans 1:17: “The righteous shall live by faith.” This insight paved the way for grace and inspired the four pillars of the Reformation: Scripture alone, faith alone, grace alone, and Christ alone.

Sola Scriptura — By Scripture Alone

Luther’s primary and possibly most groundbreaking conviction was Sola Scriptura — the belief that the Bible alone holds ultimate authority over faith and life. Back

then, Scripture was concealed behind Latin liturgies, inaccessible to most believers. Only priests and scholars could access it, and church tradition and papal decrees often outweighed the Bible. However, Luther, influenced by St. Augustine's theology, believed that God communicates directly with the human heart through Scripture, and no authority — not even the Pope — surpasses the Word of God. He translated the Bible into German so laypeople could read and engage with the living Word. This Reformation effort returned the Bible to the people — not as a relic, but as God's living voice. Today, we share this conviction: the church must be a community shaped by Scripture, continually reforming itself in accordance with the Word. The question remains relevant: Are we a church where Scripture informs our vision, mission, and conscience? Do we seek it not just for information but for transformation?

Sola Fide — By Faith Alone

From Scripture, Luther learned that salvation is not something we earn by good works or religious rituals. He wrestled deeply with guilt, constantly asking, "*How can I, a sinner, be made right with a holy God?*" The church of his day taught that human effort and church-mediated grace were necessary for salvation. But in **Romans 3:28**, Luther found freedom: "For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law." Faith, he realized, is not a human achievement — it is trust, a hand reaching out to receive what God freely gives. **By**

faith alone, we stand before God not on the basis of what we do, but on what Christ has done for us. Our confidence is not in our righteousness but in His.

This is the faith that frees us, as Jesus says in **John 8:31–36**: “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” Faith alone delivers us from fear and gives us freedom — not the freedom to do as we please, but the freedom to live as God intends.

Sola Gratia — By Grace Alone

If faith is the hand that receives, grace is the gift that is given. **By grace alone** means that salvation begins and ends in the mercy of God. As St. Augustine taught centuries before Luther, *even our desire to seek God is itself a work of God’s grace within us*. Luther carried this Augustinian insight to its full light: we do not climb the ladder of heaven by our effort — God descends to us in Christ.

The Reformation reclaimed this truth: **God’s grace is not a commodity to be sold or earned; it is the unmerited favor of a loving God**. Grace dismantles pride, removes fear, and replaces striving with gratitude. It is the heartbeat of the Christian life and the melody of the gospel.

Solus Christus — By Christ Alone

But all of these — Scripture, faith, and grace — find their center in **Christ alone**. For Luther and the other Reformers, this was the boldest and most dangerous claim

of all. To say that **Christ alone** is the head of the church was to **challenge the authority of the Pope**, who claimed headship over all the faithful. Yet the Reformers insisted that no human being could occupy the place that belongs only to the crucified and risen Lord. The Church exists not for the glory of its leaders or its traditions, but for the glory of **Christ, the living head of His body**.

This truth remains as radical today as it was five centuries ago. In a world that often measures success by size, wealth, or popularity, we are called back to the question: What does the Church exist for? It does not exist to preserve its institutions, to maintain power, or to mirror society's values. The Church exists to **proclaim Christ**, to embody His love, and to live out His Word in the world. We are not a monument to the past, but a **movement of grace** — a living body where Christ is the center and Scripture is our guide.

The Church as Living Stones

Jeremiah spoke of a **new covenant** written on the heart (Jer. 31:31–34). That covenant finds its fulfillment in Christ, who makes us **the Church of living stones** (1 Peter 2:5). Our unity is not institutional but spiritual — born of faith and sustained by grace. Psalm 46, the psalm that inspired Luther's great hymn "*A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*," declares, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." This psalm fortified the Reformers' hearts amid persecution and trial. It

continues to remind us that even in times of uncertainty, **God remains our fortress** — steadfast, immovable, sovereign.

Anthem Connection: The Living Church of Christ

And that brings us beautifully to the anthem we will sing: *“We are the church of God, a house of living stones, a monument of unity for God and God alone.”*

These words echo the essence of the Reformation: that the church’s foundation is **not human authority but divine grace**. We are God’s living temple, bound together by the Spirit, built upon the cornerstone — Christ Himself. The anthem also incorporates the hymn, *“The Church’s one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord; she is His new creation, by water and the Word.”*

How perfectly this hymn summarizes the Reformation’s heart! Scripture alone is expressed in the phrase, “by the Word.” Faith alone is expressed in the phrase, “by trusting in Him.” Grace alone is described in “by water and the Word,” and Christ alone is found in the expression “the one foundation.” To sing this anthem today is to reaffirm what Luther proclaimed at Wittenberg: that the Church stands or falls by her faithfulness to the Gospel of Christ.

Conclusion: The Church is Always Reforming

The Reformation was not a one-time event; it was the **beginning of continual renewal**. Luther’s agenda was **not to divide, but to return the Church to the**

purity of the Gospel, to let the light of Scripture, the freedom of faith, the beauty of grace, and the lordship of Christ shine anew in every generation. Today, that call is ours. The Church must always be asking: Are we still centered on Scripture? Are we still living by faith? Does grace still humble us? Are we still proclaiming Christ as Lord of all? If we are, then the Reformation continues — not as a memory, but as a **living movement** of God’s Spirit reforming His people in every age. So, let us be the **church of living stones**, the **monument of unity for God and God alone**, and let us live our confession with joy: By Scripture alone, By faith alone, By grace alone, By Christ alone. Amen.