

We hear a lot of talk today about polarizing language and politics in everyday life. Martin Luther was no stranger to polarizing language. He rarely backed down from a fight and was better at slinging mud and horse manure at his opponents in the church than many. It took awhile for Rome to pay attention to a wayward Augustinian monk, who seemed powerless and insignificant compared to the machine of empire and power. However Luther wrote enough barbed leaflets and broadsides to attract the attention of the powerful, basically calling the pope and church brass heretics for having forsaken the gospel in favour of money and power. A mouthy monk on his own doesn't matter that much to powerful people. But a monk with the backing of wealthy electors in today's Germany carries with it a certain oomph. Luther had a rare talent for being a systematic theologian, Bible translator, preacher, and able to communicate in plain language to everyday people. The Reformation was the stuff of social movements, coupled with powerful landowners. No doubt the Reformation story would ring differently in certain Alberta Lutheran churches right now under the banner of separation. Not so with our sister church Lutheran Church of the Cross in Calgary. They are also a queer-affirming congregation making space for all people including immigrants and refugees. A shoutout to colleague Pr. Lindsey who has been going through a hard time through their public advocacy. Reformation Sunday is also a time of solidarity. A time to check in on our friends, family, and colleagues. Luther knew that hard times were ahead with the split from Rome.

In our own situation we find ourselves amidst turbulent times. Even without charting a path to Reformation like Luther, simply existing in the world today is a hard enough task. I remember first learning about the Dark Ages and thinking, "Wow, sure glad I don't live in a time today where people lack basic literacy, think the Earth is flat, are suspicious of science, and fall for weird conspiracy theories." Dark Ages indeed. And yet for all the ills of our time, we are uniquely positioned much like Luther having sudden

access to an affordable printing press. A simple post on the church socials reaching out to friends in Alberta following the recent referendum vote garnered thousands of heart and like reacts. People thanking us for thinking of them. We all like to be remembered. Perhaps that is a good takeaway for us here in the congregation. We need to remember and lift up one another. We have had a number of babies born in the congregation recently. We have had people whose health has failed or waiting test results. People with mobility challenges who can't always do the activities they wish to do. Life is frustrating even without political and economic unrest.

Church is a unique place where we can not only build community. But also make space for worship, prayer, music, all creative pursuits. There is room for the Holy Spirit to ignite love, emotion, creativity, and a longing for the goodness of God. The Reformation is rooted in the gospel, the love of Jesus. And in church the Spirit is actively creating spaces in our hearts and relationships to pursue these better parts of being human. It is rare today to find third spaces like church outside of the library, and public rec centres. We are sharing our space with community choirs, with Elections BC, with the Shelbourne Community Kitchen, with young adult game and movie nights, someone who needs a drink or a bathroom, and more. Just the other day someone left a voicemail message on the church phone thanking us for the sign messages, including the recent one of carving pumpkins. Something as simple as inviting neighbours to spend time together and carve pumpkins for Halloween – All Hallows Eve – an originally Christian feast day. We celebrate All Saints Day that weekend, remembering the faithful departed.

And now for a recitation of all 95 Theses. I timed this at home and it should only take about 55 minutes, which represents an average sermon length from Luther's time...

Wait, excuse me sir, but you look like your're lost. Perhaps one of the ushers can help this man find a seat.

Young Luther: "Wahrlich, ich bin Martin Luther, und Gottes Wort ist mein einziger Schild!" (God's Word is my only shield!)

Pastor: Wait this is Déjà vu all over again. What are you, a Reformation apparition? Are you a ghost?

Young Luther: Doch! I proclaimed an incarnational theology. Just as Christ is present in the bread and wine, I am here in body and spirit. You definitely weren't trained by the Augustinians.

Pastor: Well seminaries may be a little different these days. Don't get all Smalcald Articles on me Luther!

Young Luther: I want people to know im Jahr des Herrn 2026 that the gospel has not changed one iota. You think you're fancy with your Handy (German for cell phone) and TomTom (GPS), but you're just like me.

Pastor: Yeah Luther, how so?

Young Luther: You are all weighed down in sin just like me. I wrestled with the devil to get him away from me. Today you talk about mental health and modern medicine, but it's the same result. You have turned in on yourselves, navel gazing, as Augustine would say. Scrolling, always scrolling. I know you!

Pastor: Okay, okay Luther. But where's the grace? Where is the forgiveness you talk about?

Young Luther: Du Meuchelmordbrenner (Assassin-arsonist)! "I think that if you were alone in the field, an angry cat would be enough to scare you away." It is Christ alone that saves you, not me. Reformation Sunday isn't about me. I didn't even want the church to bear my name. Look what you've done to my theology! Christ alone saves. That remains the same today. Seek love and forgiveness from the Lord your God!

Pastor: Guter Punkt. Guter Punkt. Wait, can I speak German now, talking with you? Is this an Acts of the Apostles Pentecost moment?

Young Luther: Genau! Und jetzt, musst du das Evangelium Predigen! (You must preach the gospel!)

ENTER POPE LEO X

Pope Leo X: Well what have we here...Martin Luther and some obscure Lutheran pastor.

Pastor: Wait, Pope Leo X?!?! How'd you get here?

Pope Leo X: I have my ways.

Young Luther: Aha, mein alter Freund!

Pope Leo X: You might call it that. (Showing disdain)

Young Luther: Du listiger Fuchs (You cunning fox), what are you doing here?

Pope Leo X: Hey now, I'm just here to celebrate Reformation Sunday like everyone here. Don't you see I am wearing the colour of the day?

Young Luther: Hmm...I don't know. But it does seem we aren't mortal enemies in this time sequence in 2026. Confusing times. I am told it's a different kind of Christianity – Christian nationalism selling the indulgences these days.

Pope Leo X: Quite right. And my namesake, the current pope Leo is a cool guy from Chicago. The times are a-changing.

Young Luther: Well perhaps you and I have some catching up to do. Want to grab a pint in einer Kneipe um die Ecke (at a pub around the corner)?

Pope Leo X: I'm having an Italian wine. You order your brutish German beer.

Young Luther: Some things never change. Well, we're off. Tschuss!

Pope Leo X: Ciao!

Pastor: Young Luther and Pope Leo X, everybody!

END SCENE