

Our Reformation Heritage

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[0 : 0 0] Well now, let's pray. Father, we are going to talk together about holy things.

So we bow before your throne, coming to you in the name and in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, to ask for the help of your Holy Spirit so that we may think of these holy things in a way that furthers holiness in our own hearts and lives.

Grant it, we pray, for Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen. Well, my exact title this morning is Our Reformation Heritage.

Each of those three words is important, as I'm concerned. The Reformation changed Western Europe in the 16th century and afterwards.

The heritage of the Reformation continues as part of the Western European heritage, culturally speaking, and we still encounter it in that way today.

[1 : 3 6] And the descriptive pronoun, not descriptive, what do you say? The pronoun our, anyway, indicates that we are involved, even though, of course, though Vancouver is quite some distance from Western Europe, but we are Anglicans and the Anglican Church was shaped decisively by the Reformation.

And just because we are Anglicans, the heritage is ours and we need to know about it and react responsibly to it.

I shall speak as one who believes that the way of reacting responsibly to the Reformation heritage is to embrace it rather than set oneself at a distance from it.

You may or may not agree. You may or may not agree. I ask you to suspend judgment until I've presented to you what I have to present.

And then, well, it will be for you to make up your own minds. The subject was set me, as a matter of fact, because the last Sunday in October is regularly Reformation Sunday in most, if not all, Protestant churches.

[3 : 2 5] Reformation Sunday in most, if not all, Protestant churches. Why this particular time of the year? Well, because on October 31st, 1517, Martin Luther nailed a handwritten document containing 95 theses for debate to the door of Wittenberg Parish Church, of which, in addition to his work as professor of theology in Wittenberg University, he was one of the pastors.

And in those days, if you wanted a subject discussed in public, well, nailing theses into the door or the wall in a public place was the way in which you declared your intention and set the agenda.

That's what Luther was doing. And historically, most exponents of the Reformation traced the beginning of the movement from that day.

Because what happened was that straightaway, all sorts and conditions of people in Wittenberg, and then beyond Wittenberg, took note of the theses.

They could do that, because very quickly the theses got into print. You see, the early 16th century was an age in which the power of the press was being discovered.

[5 : 22] They call it sometimes the Gutenberg age, because printing as a technique and as a profession and thus as an integral part of society had now thoroughly established itself and as today.

If you want something noted, you put it in print. Well, yes, of course, and you also put it on all sorts of little handheld devices which will show it to you in pictures.

But that's a late 20th and early 21st century development. And for some of us, print remains the basic way of communicating when you want something thought over in our society.

Well, that's enough of the historical background of the 95 theses, I think. They were triggered by the fact that around Wittenberg, in the various villages, a man named Tetzel, an ordained Catholic clergyman, was selling indulgences.

Why? Well, if you trace the action back to its source, the answer is because the Pope wanted to build the biggest cathedral in the world.

[7 : 07] And for that, he needed to raise money. The money was raised. St. Peter's in Rome was built. But out of the whole endeavor to raise the money, which led to the selling of indulgences, came the Reformation.

And you can assess that historical process any way you like. It certainly wasn't anything that the Pope had expected when he authorized the selling of indulgences throughout the whole area which the Roman Church embraced.

But this man, Tetzel by name, was traveling around with papal authority selling the indulgences. You say, what's an indulgence?

Well, it's a piece of paper with papal authority behind it declaring freedom from the need to spend time in purgatory after death, working off the temporal punishment of your sins.

In those days, it was assumed, this was standard Roman theology, professional theology as well as popular theology, that both the eternal penalty due to us for our sins and the temporal penalty due to us for our sins had to be worked off somehow.

[9 : 02] The eternal penalty, they said, was worked off by our Lord Jesus dying on the cross. The temporal penalty, however, had to be worked off in purgatory.

That was what purgatory was about. I was going to say that's what purgatory was for in this medieval theology. And the motive for buying an indulgence either in your own name or as Tetzel preached in the name of any member of your family whom you like to mention was that this person would be able to skip purgatory and go straight from his or her deathbed into glory.

Purgatory was not thought of as how can I say it as glory at all. It was thought of as a rough period that you had to endure before getting to glory.

and that notion goes right back to the 8th or 9th century BC sorry AD nobody knows who started it it was just there as part of what we would call Roman Catholic devotion and had been there you see for five or six hundred years before Tetzel came along.

well Luther in his 95 theses was challenging all of that and challenging it in the name of biblical theology that isn't what the Bible teaches said Luther the Bible teaches that sin is not remitted at all unless and until there's repentance and when there's repentance true repentance from the heart then all sin is remitted for Jesus sake purgatory doesn't come into the story purgatory said Luther and this is what he was saying from the pulpit of his church and the classroom in the university where he taught theology purgatory is a fantasy not a fact so delete it from your creed well that that was what

[12 : 08] Luther wanted to say and indeed shout from the housetops to all the people who were listening to Tetzl and that's what the 95 theses were posted up for namely to generate public debates in the university in the city of Wittenberg and anywhere else where people reading the theses wanted to challenge Martin Luther their author Luther wanted the matter discussed as widely as possible and as I said that in the providence of God was the beginning of the movement that transformed Western Europe and which we call the Reformation in the Anglican Book of Common Prayer no mention is made of

Martin Luther and the 95 theses and there's no such feast as Reformation Sunday but for those who value the Reformation heritage the way that as I've said I do myself Reformation Sunday is a significant date because the Reformation was a significant movement and we are the inheritors of the Reformation and the inheritance is precious and that as I said before is the point of view that I'm going to present to you in the way that I set before you the facts that are now coming Christians who celebrate the Reformation in the way that I do see it as a momentous recall over a period of two or three generations lasting from 1517 certainly to the end of the 16th century and from one standpoint going further a momentous recall to four realities which we believe to be scriptural which we believe that the

Western Church that's the what we call the Roman Catholic Church was missing more or less during the centuries literally before the Reformation but yet these four matters are absolutely basic to the definition of Christianity and equally they are basic to the life of God in the lives of believing human beings which is what concerns us and what we want to promote every way we can here are the four realities the authority of scripture the centrality of Jesus Christ the substance of the gospel that is to say its nature as promise to be received by faith and the reality of the church as the fellowship of those who have put faith in the promise which means putting faith in Jesus

Christ himself and so becoming part of the fellowship of Christ's disciples which was born of course in the days of Christ's own ministry and has continued without any break often amongst a minority and only a minority of worshippers but there have been disciples of Christ faithful disciples of Christ on earth despite what the church has sometimes been saying to them there have been faithful disciples of Christ from the first century until today and certainly it was so in the early 17th century when the reformation began and Luther picked this up and said it is the faithful believers who constitute the church and he was challenging the idea that the church is an institute or an institution that let me use a prejudicial word an institution that peddles salvation at a certain price and paying money for your indulgence is part of that price this is all wrong said

Luther and well people like me believe he was right that's all introductory I now sharpen the focus on these things by setting myself to answer four questions part of what I shall say in the way of answer is standard stuff which you find in books and in the schools and in the heritage which individual churches denominations congregations report as their own ancestry and part of it inevitably is my personal take on all of this and well you must distinguish between the facts which are facts whatever you think of my personal take on them and my personal take as such which you may or may not endorse we shall see okay first question how was

[18 : 50] Christianity understood in the western world in the middle ages say from the 13th to the 15th century 300 years we needn't go back any further than that during those 300 years universities were being founded and academics were expounding Christianity at an academic level interacting that is with the western philosophical heritage deriving from Plato and Aristotle but the faith of the church was what it was and as I've already indicated that was not so accurate not as accurate as it needed to be not by biblical standards my answer to the question how

Christianity was understood in the west during these centuries boils down to this Christianity was spelled out as an invitation to put yourself in the church's hands for salvation and glory and what did it mean to put yourself in the church's hands well it meant that to start with you must believe the church's faith which meant believing the apostles creed plus those extras like indulgences which the Roman Catholic Church had added over the years you must remember that the Roman Catholic Church for centuries had been insisting that it was and is the only church in the full sense of that word church

Rome had been saying that ever since what is called the great schism towards the end of the 11th century the eastern church the Greek Orthodox church as we call it and the western church the Roman Catholic church had parted company and each of them claimed from that time onwards to be the only real church the only church in the full sense of that word and well that's how it had been in the west ever since the 11th century the Catholic church claimed to be the only church it had picked up over the years the idea also that it was infallible and the infallibility was expressed its infallibility was expressed first and foremost through councils of bishops and then through utterances of popes and just for the record that is still what the

Roman Catholic church affirms about itself so that they would say you see of us as Anglicans well they're not far off being church in the full sense but there were certain things that they haven't got like the papacy and papal authority and some of the specifics of faith which the church has added to the creed and which Anglicans have dropped and they would say we suffer from not having any clear testimony to the apostolic succession of the priesthood which is maintained through the magic touch of ordination as bishops ordain priests who then become bishops and ordain priests and so it goes on we have not got the apostolic succession and for the record in 1896 the pope issued a what do you call it a bulletin no just a bull which declared in courteous but firm language that the orders of

Anglican clergy are absolutely void that is to say they are not orders in the sight of God that is Anglican priests are not equipped to fulfil the role of priests in the Church of God and that remains and because it was a papal declaration it is likely to remain so I have no expectations frankly of union between Anglicans and Roman Catholics don't be in any doubt about that I think when the Lord comes back he will find that we're still separate if only because Anglicans appealing to the Bible will maintain that contrary to the Roman idea we have got in

[24 : 45] God's mercy everything that's involved in being the Church the Church in a particular expression of its life on earth the Anglican idea well a Protestant idea is that every congregation and every denomination is a visible expression of the one body of Christ here and there and wherever and in that sense the unity of the Church is already a fact and the only question is what are we going to do to express it but we don't create it God has created it and he continues to create it by bringing people to faith in Christ which means that the Holy Spirit is given to them to unite them to Christ which means that in Christ they are united to all other

Christians everywhere in the world and that's the given unity of the Church Catholics can't accept that alright so they can't but that's one of the deep differences between us but now back to my question how does one put oneself in the Church's hands well three things you believe the Church's creed you attend the Church's worship which is quite precisely the mass to be celebrated every regularly every week and for priests more often the mass is for Roman Catholics the central form of worship and the only form of worship which is worship in full in a sense parallel to that in which the Roman Catholic Church is the Church in full everything that is less than the mass is less than worship in full that's the

Catholic idea so everyone must attend the Church's worship that is you must be regular at mass on Sunday and when the mass was celebrated in Latin as it was until the Reformation took hold in the 16th century it doesn't make a blind bit of difference the important thing is that you should be there and the expectation from the 13th to the 15th centuries still I dare say in some quarters is that the lay folk who are there will spend time during the service praying their own prayers prayers being in the pews at mass time is the ideal time for saying your own prayers everybody thought that in the 15th and 16th century everybody that is in the

Catholic Church for all through the 20th century there was a minority of vigorous scholars in the Church of Rome saying no that isn't right the people should be praying the mass along with the Church when the mass was still being celebrated in Latin a language which few of the people in the congregation would know that really was a rather forlorn case but there were good scholars who labored to make the case the whole movement was called the liturgical movement and Catholic liturgists will tell you that it's still alive and kicking now that well there's sorry I say it this way and now there's more substance

I suppose in that because Rome at last has caught up with the reformation insistence that the way to honor God in worship is to do it in a language that everybody understands so that everybody in heart and mind may join in and that priority goes back to the second Vatican council which was summoned in 1963 but you must attend the church's worship that's the important point it was so for the for the medievals and it is so still for Catholics and that's how it is that in England the Roman Catholic Church is able to claim more adherence than the Church of England because the Catholics count those present at mass in England it's about four million every Lord's

[30 : 10] Day and Anglicans count those who are present for worship sorry I'm saying it backwards and Anglicans then have to count those who are present at worship although if asked they will count as Anglicans everyone who's been baptised and that's about 20 million Englishmen but less than four million Anglicans come to church on Sunday in England so it's possible for Roman Catholics to make play with the idea that Catholicism is the dominant version of Christianity in the old country be that as it may the Catholic way is still to insist you must be at mass every Sunday so you believe the church's faith you attend the church's worship and you accept the church's discipline what does that mean it means that you submit to what is called the sacramental system the Roman

Catholic idea is that there are seven sacraments and between them they see you through from the cradle to the grave starts with baptism that leads on to confirmation when you're of an age to commit yourself to the church which is the way the Roman Catholic way of committing yourself to Christ then you become a regular at mass then or you get married and marriage is a sacrament you may or you may of course get ordained in which case you don't get married but you receive the sacrament of ordination and in due course comes the last rites that is the sacrament of what used to be called extreme unction nowadays the Catholics call it the sacrament of healing but it's still what it was that is it's the sacrament that's administered when they think when the priest thinks that the person is dying and it's the sacrament intended to prepare you for what's to come in terms of your transition from this world to the next and the whole sacramental system first to last is administered by priests and can only be administered by priests and if the priests have not been ordained in the apostolic succession well there's no warrant so Roman

Catholics say no warrant for confidence in any of the sacramental ministrations in which they engage well alright that's how you become and remain a Christian and an heir of glory according to the Roman pattern you put yourself in the church's hands in those ways well prior to the 16th century the renaissance movement took hold in western Europe and the reformation and let me say no from one standpoint was a spin-off of the renaissance movement which was a revival of scholarship with a motto *ad fontes* which is latin for go to the sources and in

Christianity going to the sources meant going to the Bible and specifically to the New Testament which is the prime source for discovering learning how it all began there were scholars around in the days when Luther nailed up his theses scholars like Erasmus who were quite well aware just because they knew their New Testament they were quite well aware that the Roman system was out of step with the New Testament at quite a number of points but they didn't see it as their business to do anything other than crack jokes about that Erasmus did it and Erasmus wrote a whole satirical survey of the

Roman ministry pattern he called it in praise of folly well alright but everybody understood this was a scholar having a joke it wasn't a scholar in the least proposing a change this is what we do and it's very funny that's all that Erasmus is saying well Luther you see was a man of a different mindset he believed that things that were wrong should be changed by being put right and so the reformation began well that's the way in which Christianity was understood and practiced from the 13th to the 15th centuries 300 years before Luther came along second question how were the changes made here we have to understand that the reformers needed politicians at their backs or they wouldn't have been able to institute the changes they did institute and in the providence of God the politicians were there ready to back the reformers and protect them and further the things which the reformers from the scriptures declared needed to be altered the pattern in the early 16th century was a pattern of monarchical autocracy that is every geographical area had its own dominant aristocrat in many places called the king and the king was the autocrat in his own kingdom and he raised whatever army there was in the kingdom and the army doubled as the police so that what the king said must happen did happen and the soldiers ensured that it happened and that's how it was actually in

[38 : 03] Luther's bit of Germany that was Saxony Duke Frederick was the monarch in Saxony and in Geneva when Calvin got going there wasn't a monarch actually it was Geneva was unusual in this but there was an elected governmental group who again raised such a as much of an army as Geneva had and ran the state and they backed Calvin they did so they say for reasons which weren't always Christian just as Frederick of Saxony actually had backed Luther for reasons which weren't entirely Christian the rulers had desires for prestige and for power in relation to states

I mean political units around them Frederick of Saxony had founded the University of Wittenberg it was his university and he wanted it to be one of the leading universities of the world Luther was his most distinguished professor and he backed Luther for the prestige of his university community and in Geneva Calvin's presence and ministry proved an attraction to immigrants so the population of Geneva grew and with that the economic prosperity of Geneva grew also and the governing council thought that that was excellent and they wanted it to go on so they backed Calvin and in England well everybody knows I suppose that the first moves in a reforming direction that is the casting off of papal authority with a declaration that the bishop of

Rome has no authority in this realm of England that was the act of Henry VIII who wanted a divorce that the bishop of Rome wouldn't give him well alright you see there are political wheels within the religious wheels in all these cases but in the providence of God the politicians who had the power were able to ensure that the reformation went ahead by backing the reformers and that's the providence that made all the difference in the first half of the 16th century that's how the changes were made the educators that is the scholars were let loose and in universities they were permitted and indeed encouraged to strut their stuff pastors were told in fact to follow the standards set by the reformers and to fulfill their ministry and practice catechizing of their congregations in terms of those doctrinal standards and each country where the reformation came very soon had a liturgy of its own for Sunday worship and the reformers all of them as a matter of fact doubled as worship leaders shaping the liturgies and then leading congregations in the use of the liturgies and so by the teaching the preaching and the teaching of the gospel the changes were made spiritually in people's lives just as by the support of the people who held the political power the outward changes which the reformers wanted were all made and established okay from that standpoint the reformation was a remarkable and very far reaching providence and that I think needs to be seen okay third question what did the changes achieve well again there's a great deal that could be said here and

I could spend a lot of time that I haven't got going over them I'm just going to refer to three broad changes which were made in all the countries where the reformation went change number one recovery of the grace of God the grace of God set forth in the gospel Luther celebrated justification by faith he insisted that true repentance is the fruit of faith true faith is the way of authentic discipleship faith means commitment commitment not simply to the church or indeed not at all to the church as an institution but to the Bible and to Christ and in the light of that double commitment then faith meant a commitment to further the life of the church in one's own area as doing it as best one could and

Luther's teaching about faith faith in the Bible and faith in Christ generated an understanding of faith which Europe hadn't seen for centuries you can find it in Augustine who wrote in the fourth and fifth centuries but you can't really find it in any theologians between Augustine and Luther what was this distinctive well it's the distinctive that we call assurance assurance is confidence that God will keep his promises as they relate to you you are claiming the promises by faith and God can be trusted to keep his promises in faithfulness now in the church's devotion for all of the 1500 years since well since

[45 : 39] Christ was on earth there hadn't been in the congregations an adequate stress laid on assurance not in the teaching in the way that the reformers saw it in scripture and said it said it out loud and very strongly faith brings assurance because faith trusts the promises of God just as faith trusts the promise of God sorry sorry just as faith trusts the God of the promise that's what I meant to say and faith trusts the whole Bible as the word of God and faith trusts Jesus Christ in all his glory as the mediator the saviour the Lord assurance is part of that package don't ever forget it I use that last phrase to reflect the emphasis which the reformers as

Bible teachers laid on assurance that the promises of God will be fulfilled in evangelical piety from the 16th century to the 20th and 21st there has been from time to time stress laid by the teachers on the reality and the glory of assurance whereby you trust the promises of God but it's been fluctuating and spotty as an ingredient in the evangelical faith because again and again for whole generations anyway the faithful have lost sight of the assurance assurance that the gospel should bring and have not lived in

Christian assurance the way that Christians should well I'm telling you that the reformers highlighted Christian assurance and one of the things that we will do if we are wise is to pick up that emphasis and make it part of our own devotion thus we shall never forget that Luther insisted that true repentance true faith and God given assurance are a single package and we shall never forget that Calvin linked everything that he said about the authority of scripture and everything that he said about the election of God he linked it with assurance as the authentic Christian state of mind state of mind which should mark every believer and we should never forget that

Cranmer highlighted Christian assurance in his liturgy it's there in the prayer book time doesn't permit me to go into the place any of the places in the prayer book where assurance is expressed suffice to say that there are plenty of them in this Cranmer was consciously following Luther because he believed from the Bible that Luther got it right and so Christian worshippers in the Anglican world should be Christians with assurance and that should be one of the marks of the Anglican way as it's lived I say that because I'm so conscious that in most of the world Anglicanism that I have seen and know about the typical

Anglican attitude when people are asked about their faith is to say well I'm not sure I'm not sure really about the Creed I'm certainly not sure about the Bible and I'm not sure about my own salvation I think there's something presumptuous in claiming to be sure of where you stand with God it's a scandal that any Anglicans anywhere in the world should be thinking and talking like that but you don't need me to tell you that this is how many Anglicans do see see themselves and their situation and well I'm telling you this seems to me to be a very unhappy state of affairs but now when I say that the changes of the reformation involved first recovery of the grace of God I'm thinking not only of the truth about the cross and the achievement of Christ when he died for our sins and when he rose from the dead triumphantly having put our sins away

[51 : 21] I'm thinking also of assurance and the joy that comes from knowing where you are with a promise keeping faithful God I must hurry on the second thing that the changes of the reformation achieved in my list is the reality of Christian life serious teaching about discipleship came out of the reformation sermons were preached to further godliness catechisms were created and used for the instruction of congregations of all ages may I say to ensure that everyone would know what know in a clear headed way what they should be believing about the Christian life that's induced by the gospel of

God when blessed in the heart by the Holy Spirit and in Anglicanism to speed up the process Archbishop Cranmer as perhaps you know in his own lifetime generated the publishing of homilies that is to say written out sermons which clergy could and should read from the pulpit just because Cranmer was a realist and he knew that the majority of Anglican clergymen in his day could not be trusted to prepare and preach faithful gospel sermons of their own they would in other words get things wrong so Cranmer published the book of homilies in order to ensure that the basics of the message would be got right two books of homilies actually were published one in

Cranmer's lifetime masterminded by him and the second under Elizabeth masterminded as a sequel to the first set and when they're all printed together you get a book as thick as this this is my copy of a modern reprint of the book of homilies and there are 620 pages and plenty of stuff as you can see for clergy to read in order to drill people in the basics of the gospel and the life of faith the life of faith and faithfulness first homily a fruitful exhortation to the reading and knowledge of holy scripture second homily a sermon of the misery of all mankind and his condemnation to death everlasting by his own sin third homily a sermon of the salvation of mankind by only

Christ our savior from sin and death everlasting nothing a fourth homily a short declaration of the true lively Christian faith fifth a sermon of good works annexed unto faith sixth sermon a sermon of Christian love and then well more quite a lot more time doesn't permit me to go through the whole of it but you can see from those titles Cranmer's idea everybody by all means must be instructed in the basics of the gospel the basics of the Christian life according to the gospel Cranmer wanted the Bible to be known by all Christians and that's why the first of the homilies is a summons to regular faithful Bible reading and if we may for the moment flip to Calvin

Calvin wrote in the Institutes a classic exposition of what we call sanctification which is the Christian life lived out in terms of holiness and he expounded the Christian life under two broad headings mortification that is the resisting and killing of sinful desire and vivification that's the stirring up and strengthening of the graces of the Holy Spirit the fruit of the Spirit as Paul describes it in Galatians chapter 5 you remember the fruit of the Spirit is love joy peace long-suffering gentleness goodness faithfulness etc self-control at the end of the list these are moral qualities which put together appear as a reflection of the moral character of the Lord Jesus when he was on earth and that's what's to be reproduced in our lives through the action of the Holy Spirit blessing the word to our hearts and nowadays we call that formation spiritual formation and that's the final aspect of the reality of the Christian life that I wanted to mention and then the third aspect of what the changes

[57 : 42] I mean the the reformation changes achieved is the renewal of the church as a school where you learn the life of faith in Christ you learn what it is and then you learn to live it and as a worshipping community fellowship a fellowship of folk who individually all have and exercise faith in Christ to the glory of God when they're together you didn't have that of course under the mass in the Roman system but that's what worship was meant to be for the children of the reformation and last question I see I'm overrunning as I usually do so I'll be quick on this how are we to value our heritage my answer to that is very highly and that leads to a second question how do we show that we value our heritage highly and I answer that by saying by continued discipleship on the one hand continued learning of the faith of the scriptures and on the other hand continued practice of the disciplines of holiness so that your life reflects the moral standard that we see in the Lord Jesus let me finish by saying this is essentially what the Roman church has caught up with since Vatican II and all the well the major popes since Vatican II starting with

John XXIII who summoned the council that's what they've all been concerned about you could say it in a phrase Christian reality matching and from the Roman standpoint adjusting the Christian reality that evangelical Protestants have been seeking to promote in the church ever since Luther's day in the 16th century Rome is as called on Rome is catching up and in some ways Rome is ahead of us they've got further than we Protestants have got in catechizing for instance teaching the basics of the faith to all ages in their congregations and well we should take that I think as an encouragement to us to ensure that we don't fall behind Rome in any aspect of the ministry of discipling which any of our in any of our congregations is set up yes and the time is gone and I must stop this is how I think that our reformation heritage should be understood and valued and practiced as a pattern for church life today we are right at the heart of the gospel as you can see in relation to all these things and for the glory of

Christ the glory of the father indeed the glory of the holy trinity these things ought to be primary in our concern so at least I believe and that's the assessment with which I want to leave you thank you for listening applause and that's