

October 22, 2017  
Sermon for Reformation t-minus 1  
St Peter Lutheran Church  
Bowie, TX  
Larry Knobloch, Pastor  
Jude 3–4

*J.J.- Jesu Juva—Help me, Jesus*

Jude 3–4 (ESV)

<sup>3</sup> Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. <sup>4</sup> For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior,  
Jesus Christ!

Amen.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus, dear sons and daughters of the Reformation:

More important by far than America's bicentennial.

More important than the 500th anniversary of Columbus discovering a new world.  
Unquestionably one of the most significant anniversaries of the last thousand years—second  
only to the 2000th birthday of Christ.

The 500th anniversary of Luther nailing the Ninety-Five Theses to the church door in  
Wittenberg, Germany.

The reason we celebrate this isn't to pat ourselves on the back. Reformation isn't just a  
day simply to be proud of our heritage. Instead, we are reminded us what it takes to be a  
strong and faithful tool of God. Holding true to God's Word and confessing Christ, and Him  
crucified! (1 Corinthians 2:2)

There was a celebration almost 100 years ago, for the 400<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the  
Reformation and Rev. and professor W.H. T. Dau spoke some of the same words we speak  
today in celebration, but also thanksgiving for the Reformation.

The power of our continuing witness as confessional Lutherans is in the fact that we  
never compromised, that we fearlessly hold to and contend for, the faith once and for all time  
delivered to the saints in Holy Scripture.        Yes, God has blessed that faithfulness.

What about our church today?

As we celebrate the 500th anniversary of an event more earth-shaking and earth-shaping than  
Columbus, would outsiders still write as glowingly about us?

And what about the future?

Do we have what it takes to be what we were?

Do we as a church still have those things that brought such blessing?

Whatever else it meant, the Reformation was all about doctrine.

Certainly it had social and political implications; the Reformation changed the face of society, the map, the economy of Europe and the world.

But all that really mattered to Luther was the pure teaching of God's Word.

The Ninety-Five Theses were doctrinal statements. They're hanging in the Narthex. Take a look.

At Worms when Luther was challenged to recant his teaching, "Here I stand" was a doctrinal statement. Whether you believe the rumors that report that he really didn't say those words, the doctrine that Luther preached certainly did.

Our text today is about preserving that pure doctrine. From the apostle Jude, vv 3 and 4:

*"Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.<sup>4</sup> For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ."*

The same truths the Reformation taught are true today. Jude says in our text, *"The faith . . . was once for all delivered to the saints."*

Pure doctrine never changes; it's once and forever. Just as the Reformation once declared, so today we're still not saved by anything we do.

We're still saved solely by what Christ has done for us. We are justified, we are forgiven of our sins, today the same way as ever—**because Christ died for them.**

And everyone today who believes those words still has eternal life.

This was true for Luther; it's true for you and me.

This faith gave Luther eternal life in heaven. By this same faith, you now also have heaven.

Every doctrine grows from this one simple truth. It's really all one doctrine. And it is just as true today as it ever was. If today we are still to be what we were, then it is essential that we still have that same doctrine. And we certainly do confess this.

We tell the world that Luther's Small Catechism, the Augsburg Confession, the whole Book of Concord is the correct exposition of God's Holy Word.

But is that all it means really to have the same doctrine?

In the year 1529, twelve years after the Ninety-Five Theses, Protestants were divided generally into two broad groups: followers of Luther and followers of the Swiss reformer Ulrich Zwingli.

Now, everyone knew that it would be wonderful if these two groups could get together as one church. So a conference was called at Marburg, Germany.

From the start, Luther knew what the key issue would be. Before the conference began, Luther drew a big circle on the table that they were meeting at, and in that circle he wrote the words, "*This is My body.*" Then he covered it with a tablecloth.

For several days, Luther, Zwingli, and their colleagues debated.

They discussed fifteen major theological questions, and they reached agreement on fourteen and a half of those fifteen issues.

Now surely that should be agreement enough to join together as one church. **Except** that there was still this one little sticking point. Zwingli would not move off the idea that the bread and wine in Holy Communion only represented the body and blood of Christ.

So, finally, Luther pulled back the tablecloth.

And there it was: *“This is My body.”*

Fourteen and a half out of fifteen is not close enough if it means compromising the words of Christ. That kind of dedication to pure doctrine is what it means to have the same doctrine as Luther and our forebears.

Do we have that kind of dedication to the pure doctrine today?

Do we? There are many willing to simply overlook the clear Words of Jesus when He said: *“this is my body...this is my blood”* thinking well surely Jesus meant represents or symbolizes, so we can, for the sake of agreement, agree to disagree. However, the Words are there nonetheless, and who are we to second guess the Words of our Lord?

Zwingli and his followers did it. Are we willing to trade the Real Presence of Christ in Holy Communion for just a symbol of Christ?

Do we really still have the same doctrine the Reformation sought to set free?

Do we have what it takes to be what we were?

Can we hang on to the pure doctrine, to be what we were? It takes courage, it takes a *lot* of courage.

Jude says in our text: *“Beloved, . . . I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith.”*

Jude knew it was necessary to beg fellow Christians to contend, to hang in there, to hang tough, for the pure doctrine. He knew that’s not the easy thing; it’s not the natural thing to do. It takes courage; it takes guts.

Lutherans needed guts in 1817 especially. To supposedly “celebrate” the 300th anniversary of the Reformation, the king of Prussia decided to force the Lutherans in his region

of Germany to compromise that one little sticking point of the Real Presence of Christ in Holy Communion and join together with the Reformed, like followers of Zwingli, as one church. So basically the king said, ignore your doctrine for peace and agreement.

Other parts of Germany soon felt pressure to do the same, and in 1838, some in nearby Saxony decided there was only one way to remain pure: they loaded up five ships and crossed the ocean, bound for Missouri.

That took guts. One of the ships didn't make it—lost at sea with all fifty passengers.

Meanwhile, most of what passed for Lutheranism in America at that time was no better than in Germany; they'd already compromised all the same doctrines.

In Indiana and Ohio, Friedrich Wyneken, Wilhem Sihler, and a handful of others labored on believing they were the only true Lutheran pastors on the continent. They were ignored, shunned by their supposedly Lutheran brother pastors. It took courage to take that. It took guts. But then Wyneken, Sihler, and the others stumbled across the bold writings of one of those Missourians, C. F. W. Walther, and Wyneken exclaimed, "Thank God, there are yet more Lutherans in America!"<sup>2</sup> By God's grace, they came together and in 1847 formed the German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio and Other States, the precursor to the LC-MS.

Do we have the same courage that they did? We don't like to be in conflict—especially when in our very politically correct age people say, "Who's really to say who's right?"

Do we have the courage today to do the tough thing, to say right out loud, "I have studied God's Word, and this is what I believe it teaches. I believe that Jesus is the only way to heaven, and anyone who believes otherwise is going to hell"?

Do we have the courage to say that, when we know it's sure to get us labeled as narrow-minded, as Neanderthal, and as unloving?

It doesn't cost us anything like it cost Luther or any of the other early reformers.

For us, it's relatively easy. But do we really have the courage that it does take?

Do we have what it takes to be what we were?

Do we really have what it takes to be what we were?

We do—if we still have the same God. Do we, in our church today, still have the same God?

Jude says, v 4: *“Certain people have crept in unnoticed . . . ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ”*.

Is it possible that, without noticing, we could lose the true God?

Zwingli was becoming absolutely infuriated with Luther there in Marburg in 1529.

He couldn't understand why Luther wouldn't budge.

Why was Luther making such a big deal about the human body of Jesus? Why wouldn't he give an inch? Finally, he asked, “Dr. Luther, just what God do you worship?”

And Luther said, “None other than the God who became a man and nursed at Mary's breast—and I want no other.” Fourteen and a half out of fifteen points of agreement may look like agreement, but they're not at all if they give up the one and only true God.

Now, don't get me wrong. I'm not saying that members of other Christian denominations who do believe some false teaching don't believe in the triune God and have eternal life. They do. But shouldn't we strive to stay as close to God's Word as possible, in all situations? Even the ones that don't seem to follow human logic?

If we compromise God's Word in any form, especially when we let human reason override God's Word, then to that extent, we certainly don't have what it takes to be what we were.

Do we have what it takes to be what we were?

Do we have the same God?

Dear friends, the same God who worked the miracle of change during the Reformation is here with us today in His Word.

The same God who stood by Dr. Martin Luther, the same God who gave the fledgling LC-MS the courage to stand in a compromising world, is here with us today in His Word.

He is the same God, the one and only God who became a man. Jude says: *“our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ”*.

The One who knows the struggles and the pressures of this world.

The One who understands the courage it takes—and understands why we have so little courage.

The One who did what it took to make us what we are—children of God—by dying on a cross.

That same God is with us. The one true God of grace who forgives our faithlessness. Who by His grace, His power, has worked such amazing things through our church—despite our unworthiness.

Because—you know what?—that’s something else we’ve always been, even in our very best days: unworthy.

And even in our unworthiness, see what this God of grace has done for us!

Now see what He *will* do—through us, we pray, and most certainly through true sons and daughters of the Reformation in every future generation!

Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep our hearts and minds through  
Christ Jesus.

Amen.

S.D.G.—Soli Deo Gloria

### **Sermon Outline**

#### ***Do We Have What It Takes to Be What We Were?***

*Jude 3-4*

- I. Do we have the same doctrine?
- II. Do we have the same courage?
- III. Do we have the same God?

1. *Pilger durch Welt und Kirche* (a publication of the General Council), vol 5, 370; quoted in W. H. T. Dau, "At the Milestone," essay in *Ebenezer: Reviews of the Work of the Missouri Synod during Three Quarters of a Century*, ed. W. H. T. Dau (St. Louis: CPH, 1922), 530–31.

2. Spoken by Friedrich Wyneken, quoted in Julius A. Friedrich, "Dr. C. F. W. Walther," essay in *Ebenezer: Reviews of the Work of the Missouri Synod during Three Quarters of a Century*, ed. W. H. T. Dau (St. Louis: CPH, 1922), 29.