

THE TOWER

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GUEST SERMON

“Reluctant Rebel”

by

Bruce Wells

October 27, 2013



Today, as we all know, is Reformation Sunday, which marks a milestone in the evolution of the Protestant Church. It celebrates the actions of a Roman Catholic priest and professor of theology, Martin Luther, who on October 31, 1517, All Souls Eve, nailed his 95 Theses to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany.

A “thesis” is basically a proposition one states to be written on or clarified in order to be discussed and defended.

“Reformation” means to reform by amending what is perceived as wrong and restoring it to a better state or condition. In other words to RE-FORM, to change, hopefully for the better. The word *change* is a word that can create discomfort, anxiety, and even fear, but if we are to progress, we must at some time resort to change.

Recall a few years ago when Park Congregational Church realized it was necessary to sell the building at 80 Russell Street. Remember the anxiety that we went through over this unavoidable change. We considered multiple options, even the dreaded “M” word--merger. We fretted, we prayed, but we kept considering alternatives that would preserve our congregation, and in the end God responded to our prayers and created the conditions whereby we came to this lovely sanctuary where we are able to continue our mission.

Meanwhile, back to the Castle Church door in Wittenberg. What we need to emphasize is that Martin Luther’s original goal was merely to get the Pope and higher echelons of the Roman Catholic hierarchy to discuss his theses. He did not initially intend a complete break with Rome; he simply requested consideration of “modifications,” which is why I label him a “Reluctant Rebel.” However, he soon discovered that the Catholic Church did not consider itself a debating society, and the local archbishop, after checking the 95 Theses for heresy, forwarded the matter to Rome.

Just what were some of the things in the 95 Theses that Luther wanted to discuss?

Primary among them was the selling of indulgences which enabled souls in Purgatory to proceed to heaven for a fee. Luther was outraged that people should have to pay for what he felt was theirs by right as a free gift from God.

Another concern was the matter of repentance. Luther did not feel confession to a priest was necessary since he believed that people could communicate directly with God and forgiveness was God's prerogative.

All church printing at the time was in Latin, but Luther felt that the Bible should be in the language of the people--the vernacular--in this case, German. Luther, himself, undertook the project of translating the Bible into German.

Luther contended that salvation is not earned by good deeds, but is received only through God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Recall the scripture reading from Titus 3:5, “. . . not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy, He has saved us.”

Luther felt that the people should have a more active role in the worship service, such as by singing hymns, which he advocated because he was a prolific writer of hymns.

Later, he rejected the concept of Purgatory and the need for a celibate clergy. He himself eventually married a former nun and they went on to raise six children.

The refusal of the Roman Catholic Church to heed Luther's call for reform forced Luther to set out on his own. As pastor of the Castle Church and as a professor of theology at Wittenberg University, he had an audience, and was not totally alone. His sermons attracted many people to whom his ideas had appeal.

The fact that the printing press had been invented in the preceding century enabled mass printed copies of Luther's ideas. Within a couple of weeks, Germany was saturated with his pamphlets, and within a few months his concepts were being read throughout Europe.

But his proposed policies were fraught with danger, because the Roman Catholic Church was the universal Christian Church in Western Europe, and in many instances

was closely aligned with the royalty who ran the individual countries. So Luther's actions were offending not only the Catholic Church, but also the rulers of the various countries.

In 1521, the Diet of Worms, a general assembly of the estates of the Holy Roman Empire convened under Emperor Charles V. Luther was invited to appear, but feared for his life until Frederick III of Saxony personally obtained safe conduct promises for Luther to and from the meeting.

At the meeting, Johann Eck, speaking on behalf of the Archbishop of Trier, showed Luther copies of the 95 Theses and other works he had written and asked if Luther stood by their contents. The next day Luther returned to make his now famous statement:

Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason . . . I am bound by the Scripture I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. May God help me. Amen.

Recall the scripture reading from Hebrews 10:23, "Let us hold fast to our faith without wavering." Luther had held fast to his beliefs in spite of intimidation and threats, but he was now in a dangerous position.

The immediate results of the Diet of Worms were:

1. Luther was excommunicated from the Catholic Church.
2. He was labeled an outlaw.
3. He was to be arrested.
4. He was to be punished as a heretic.
5. It would be a crime to give him food or shelter.
6. He could be killed by anyone with no legal consequence.

When Frederick III heard this, he sent his men to intercept Luther and brought him to Wartburg Castle for sanctuary. Luther continued his writing from Wartburg Castle and his influence spread. Eventually, the citizens of Wittenberg invited him back and he resumed his pastorate.

Luther was not alone in seeking reformation in the 16th century. Among others seeking

to alter the status quo were John Calvin, a clergyman who fled from France to Switzerland and was instrumental in forming the Reformed Church; John Knox, a former priest, who founded the Presbyterian Church in Scotland; and Henry VIII, who after problems with the Pope over a divorce the King was seeking, broke relations with Rome and declared himself the head of the Church of England.

In spite of the emerging differences in Protestantism, the five emerging pillars of the Reformation were (ironically with Latin titles):

Sola Scriptura—by scripture alone

The Bible alone is the sole authority in all matters of faith. Scripture alone is the final authority.

Sola Christus—by Christ alone

Christ alone is set forth as the only mediator between God and man. Recall John 14:6, “No man comes to the Father, but by me.”

Sola Gratia—by grace alone

Grace is the unmerited eternal salvation of God which comes freely to the sinner as a gift through the atonement of Jesus Christ.

Sola Fide—by faith alone

When God justifies sinners, God declares them to be exempt from punishment and entitled to reward solely on the ground of what Christ has done for them. Again, recall Romans 3:28, “Man is justified by faith without the deeds of law.”

Soli Deo Gloria—Glory to God alone

God’s promises save us, not we ourselves. God alone is responsible for our salvation. 2 Timothy 1:9, “. . . who hath saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before the world began.”

Back to the Castle Church in Wittenberg. Martin Luther is appropriately buried beneath the pulpit from which he initiated his quest for reform. Today, we remember and honor Martin Luther who gave us our independence and a new interpretation of the scriptures which enables us to continue as a viable force in the worship of God. Nearly 500 years later he forces us to reflect on such a concept as “Are we ready to re-form again if the situation should demand it? Our church is a self-governed and

self-maintained entity wherein the members determine what the church is, and more importantly, what the church can be. Amen.

THANK YOU TO DEACONS BRUCE WELLS, JUDY DEVOE, AND KIMBERLY PELKEY

. . . for leading the worship service during Pastor Gary's day off on Sunday, October 27. Bruce wrote and delivered his own sermon on Martin Luther (see above).

THANK YOU TO PASTOR GARY AND FRIENDS AT PARK CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

. . . for your support at the Ecclesiastical Council on September 11 that voted to accept Worcester Fellowship as the newest congregation of the Central Association. We are the first "church without walls" in the 214-year history of the Massachusetts Conference.

Pastor Liz Magill and Associate Pastor Georgeanne Bennett

THANK YOU PARK CHURCH MEMBERS AND FRIENDS

. . . for the several get well wishes, calls, and cards that I received during my period of recuperation and a special thanks for your many prayers which I'm sure were instrumental in the success of my surgery.

With my sincere gratitude and appreciation,
Chris Wilson

THANK YOU YOUTH GROUP OF PARK CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

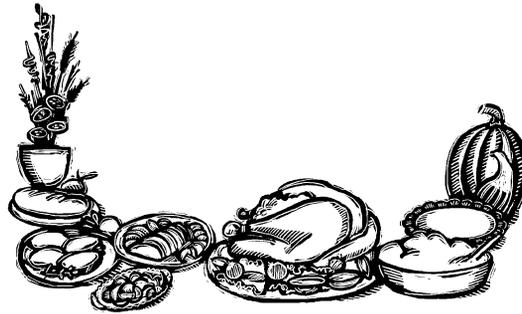
. . . who chose to add meaning to the holiday season last year by taking part in an alternative gift activity for Heifer International and the hardworking people we serve. It is a meaningful way to celebrate the Christmas season and provide lasting change for families in some of the poorest countries in the world. Whenever your congregation takes part in a holiday Living Gift Market for Heifer, they share generosity and love with families in need around the world and fulfill the call to care for the hungry and poor. For the struggling families who only need one opportunity to lift themselves out of poverty, these gifts transform their lives. I'm deeply appreciative of your support for Heifer International and hope that your Christmas activities are filled with warmth and fond times with family and friends. As we prepare for Christmas this year, I wish your entire congregation peace and happiness.

With peace and goodwill,
Pierre U. Ferrari, President and CEO, Heifer International

THANK YOU FOLKS OF PARK CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

. . . who supported Carty Cupboard Food Pantry over the past year. Your weekly and monthly donations are always appreciated. We really could not do what we do without your help. Thank you for thinking of us while you shop!

Sincerely,
Nancy Spencer, Carty Cupboard Coordinator



THANKSGIVING DONATIONS

This year we will once again purchase supermarket gift cards for the needy. Please be sure to mail your donation to the church made out to “Park Congregational Church” and marked “Thanksgiving Project” on the memo line of the check. Those of you who have offering envelopes can use the Thanksgiving envelope. Leftover funds from last year are very low. Please give to this worthwhile cause as many families are still struggling in the Worcester area. We again thank Ann Lavalley and Christine Wilson for overseeing this ministry. DEADLINE for donations is November 13, 2013.

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**MOVIE MATINEE ON NOVEMBER 17
PRESENTS *HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS***

Holly Hunter and Robert Downey, Jr, star in this 1995 comedy that captures the spirit of the Thanksgiving holiday. It's food, family, and mayhem! Directed by Jodie Foster. Don't forget to bring your brown bag lunch. We meet in the Roy Room following the worship service. The movie begins at 11:30am. It is rated PG-13.



NOVEMBER BIRTHDAYS

- 4 Daphne Spear
- 5 Josep Rose
- 13 Charlotte Thalin
- 16 Kathi Rose
- 18 Gordon Wilson
- 22 Ruth Menzigian
- 27 Lynn Hakala
- 30 Jannelle Lindquist



**GAME NIGHT WILL TAKE PLACE ON SATURDAY EVENING,
NOVEMBER 9, AT 6:30PM IN THE LEE ROOM.
PIZZA WILL BE PROVIDED!!!**

Notice the change in time. Bring your favorite board games! Bring your friends! Bring snacks! It's lots of fun! Youth and children are welcome! It's a great way to socialize!

SUNDAY SCHOOL BREAD SALE!

Back by popular demand, the Sunday School will be holding a
BREAD SALE

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 24, in Gordon Hall during Fellowship Hour
BAKE . . . BUY . . . or BOTH!
Just in time for Thanksgiving!!!

CHRISTMAS WREATH SALE!

The Christmas Wreath Sale is now on and the Youth Group/Sunday School are currently taking orders! Those who ordered either wreaths or centerpieces in the past enjoyed the beauty of their purchases for many weeks and those who received them as gifts were delighted! **ORDERS MUST BE RECEIVED BY NOVEMBER 17** and wreaths/centerpieces will be shipped UPS and will arrive between December 3 and 10. See any Youth Group or Sunday School salesperson for pictorial brochures with choices!

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**DON'T MISS DR. PETER MAKARI'S LECTURE,
"CHRISTIANS AND THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT: PRESENCE AND WITNESS"
ON SUNDAY AFTERNOON, NOVEMBER 24, AT 3:00PM AT THE HOME OF THE
WORCESTER AREA MISSION SOCIETY (THE FORMER UNITED CONGREGATIONAL
CHURCH), 6 INSTITUTE ROAD, WORCESTER**

Peter Makari, PhD, has recently returned from a trip to the Middle East and will bring us the latest news about the United Church of Christ's current relationships there, our mission partners, and the context in which they work. Peter has served as the Executive for the Middle East and Europe with the Common Global Ministries Board of the United Church of Christ and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) since July 1, 2000. He served as the Co-chair of the National Council of Churches Interfaith Relations Commission until the Council's recent reorganization. He is a staff resource person for the national UCC Palestine/Israel Network. An Egyptian-American, Peter has lived in the Middle East, where he worked with the Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services (CEOSS) in Cairo (1991-1994), and then with the Middle East Council of Churches, based in Limassol, Cyprus (1997-2000). He earned an MA in Middle East Studies from the American University in Cairo and a PhD in Politics and Middle East Studies from New York University. He is the author of *Conflict and Cooperation: Christian-Muslim Relations in Contemporary Egypt*, Syracuse University Press, 2007. Come and hear one of the most significant voices on the situation in the Middle East.

This talk is co-sponsored by the Massachusetts Conference Israel/Palestine Task Team and the Worcester Area Mission Society. Pastor Gary is organizing this event.

AS WINTER APPROACHES, ALWAYS KEEP THE FOLLOWING WINTER EMERGENCY ITEMS AVAILABLE:

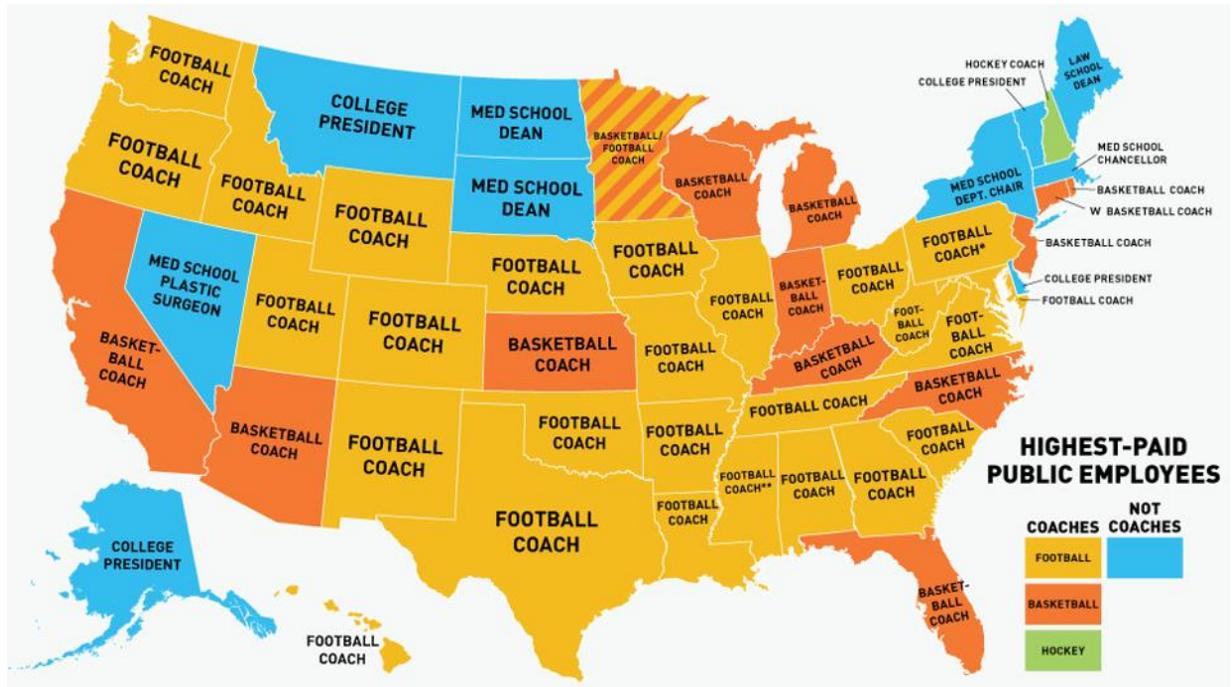
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|---|----------------------------------|
| flashlight and extra batteries | non-perishable food |
| portable radio or NOAA Weather Radio with extra batteries | extra blankets and sleeping bags |
| first-aid kit | bottled water |
| | non-electric can opener |

NEW ADDRESSES, PHONE NUMBERS, AND EMAIL:

Kimberly Pelkey
ktpelkey@gmail.com

Charlotte Thalín
Thompson House
PO Box 1117
80 Maple Street
Brattleboro VT 05302-1117
802-254-4977

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THIS CHART?



WHERE ARE OUR NATION'S PRIORITIES?

THE CHILDREN'S TOWER

November 2013



Dear Children,

At this time as we look forward to the wonderful smell of turkey cooking, delicious sweet and regular potatoes, maybe some turnip, and of course, marvelously smelling ALL KINDS OF PIES on the Thanksgiving table, let us think about preparing for this time of gratefulness. As all these wonderful goodies that make our Thanksgiving table so bountiful must be planned for and prepared for with care, I would like you to take time to *prepare* as well though you are probably not the cook! Let's call it a time to "prepare with prayer." Here is how it goes . . .

Monday

Start and end your day with a prayer of **gratitude**. Gratitude for all the people in your life who love and care for you. Gratitude for your Church Family.

Tuesday

Start and end your day with a prayer of **compassion**. Compassion for those who are suffering from pain or sadness. Compassion for those who will be alone on Thanksgiving.

Wednesday

Start and end your day with a prayer of **acceptance**. Live your day accepting yourself and others for who they are.

Thursday

Start and end your day with a prayer for **meaning and purpose**. Pray for humility and a kind heart that you might share with others.

Friday

Start and end your day with a prayer for **forgiveness**. Forgiveness for yourself and others; a fresh start.

Saturday

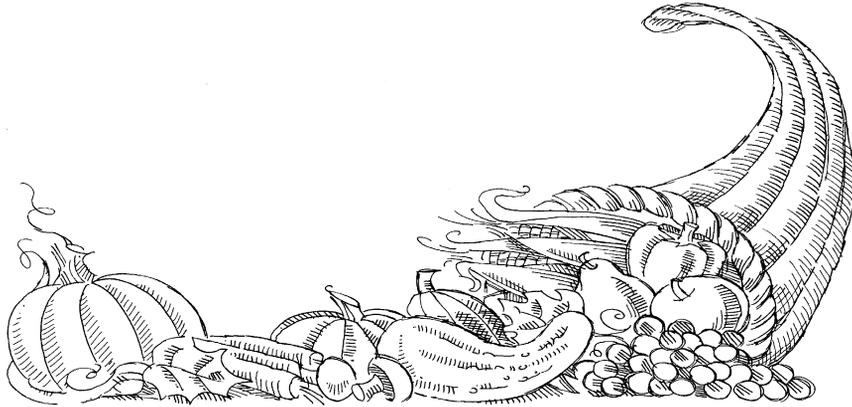
Start and end your day with a prayer of **celebration**. Celebrate YOUR life and the lives of those around you. Savor the joy it brings!

Sunday

Start and end the day with a prayer of **reflection**. Reflect with THANKSGIVING on all that God has given to you only through His grace.

Thanksgiving blessings . . . *your friend, Linda*

HAPPY & BLESSED THANKSGIVING



THE TOWER

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