



## Reformation Day

### Focus Scripture John 8:31–36

Additional Scriptures  
Jeremiah 31:31–34  
Psalm 46  
Romans 3:19–28

**Gracious God,  
write your law on  
our hearts and  
let your word of  
grace dwell in us  
so that no matter  
where we are, we  
may know we are  
forgiven and free.  
Amen.**

# Reformation Day (Years A, B, C)

**O**n Reformation Day the church honours Martin Luther and other reformers of the sixteenth century, and reformers of every age. Luther’s teachings focused on the promises of scripture, emphasizing that the Spirit works in our hearts to speak God’s word to us and that we receive God’s grace through our faith in Christ. This is the truth that makes us free. Our life in the Body of Christ is shaped by this gift of freedom.

### Focus Scripture: John 8:31–36

Most scholars believe that the gospel of John was written around 85–90 CE. Jesus’ identity and teachings are the priorities in this gospel. John draws us into the new life and understanding of God’s purpose that Jesus makes possible.

Reflected in the focus reading today is the struggle within the early church between Jews who accepted Jesus as Messiah and those who did not. This division was probably not as sharp in Jesus’ time as the words in John might lead us to believe. When the gospel of John refers to “Jews,” it usually is speaking of Jewish religious leaders. It may be helpful to think of the dialogue in John between Jesus and the Jews as a challenging discussion among “family members” who are experiencing a strained relationship.

Verse 30 is a springboard into the focus verses. Jesus has been teaching, and verse 30 reports: “As he was saying these things, many believed in him.” Jesus’ words to these new believers begin in verse 31.

Living in Jesus’ way leads to truth, which in turn leads to freedom. The Jews are puzzled by Jesus’ teaching and claim that because they are descendants of Abraham, they are already free. They claim they have never been slaves, neglecting to recall the time of slavery in Egypt or the Babylonian exile.

In John, the writer uses the phrase “very truly I tell you” (v. 34) to signal that a new teaching is to follow. In verses 34–36, Jesus addresses the group’s misunderstanding of freedom with the new teaching that everyone who sins is not free and is a slave to sin. Jesus teaches that slavery is not limited to an economic reality, but also is an inward state of being. Even those who claim freedom through Abraham are not as free as they think.

Through Jesus, the Son, we are given a permanent place in the house of God. True freedom comes through Jesus the Christ, not any human ancestor. True freedom comes not from one’s heritage, but as a gift from God. Truth for the Jews involved their identity in Abraham; Jesus’ truth involves identity in God.

The leaders of the Reformation emphasized the gospel teaching that true freedom is not related to ethnic distinctions or social class. Only Jesus the Christ can free us from slavery to sin, and does so through the truth of the gospel.

Martin Luther felt that the heart of gospel truth is summed up in **Romans 3:19–28**. All people fall short in their relationship with God, but God offers forgiveness of sins through Christ. We are justified – put right with God – by the gift of God’s grace, through faith in Christ.

The Hebrew exiles in Babylon blamed the slavery of exile on their ancestors who had disregarded God’s law. In **Jeremiah 31:31–34**, the prophet envisions a future time when the ability to know God and God’s truth will be a gift from God, written on each heart.

**Psalm 46** is the inspiration behind Luther’s classic Reformation hymn, “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.” The words of the psalmist, and the words of Luther, call disciples to place their hope in God alone.



Scripture calls us to live with God’s law on our hearts, to let our faith determine how we act. Jesus invites us to open our hearts to receive God’s gifts of grace and salvation – to claim our freedom in Christ. What in the church today needs to be reformed by God’s grace? What might you and your church do differently through the reforming, restoring power of the Holy Spirit?



## Prepare

**NOTE:** All of these suggestions are mere starting points; adapt, delete and add according to your local needs.

- ❑ Recruit *volunteers* for worship: one to help with gather, a soloist for after the words of assurance, one for the John reading, three for the prayers of the people.
- ❑ Choose a *Seasons of the Spirit* poster that suggests looking forward or contemplating the future.
- ❑ Prepare the *media presentation* for the prayer of confession.

## Gather

Display the *Seasons of the Spirit* poster you selected. Have pieces of paper and markers available on a table. As people gather for worship, invite them to consider the following question: What is one change you pray the church will make as we move into the future? Write a word or phrase summarizing this vision and tape it near the entrance of the worship space. Have an instrumentalist play “Spirit of Life” or another gathering song throughout the call to worship.

### Call to worship

*(inspired by Psalm 46)*

*Begin with some chaotic sounds – perhaps a recording of storm sounds, or a few crashing cymbals, or dissonant chords played on one or more keyboards or brass instruments. Follow this with a moment of complete stillness.*

**LEADER ONE:** In the midst of storm and chaos,

**LEADER TWO:** God is with us.

**ALL:** Let us rejoice.

**LEADER ONE:** In a world of violence and fear,

**LEADER TWO:** God shatter spears and brings peace.

**ALL:** Let us rejoice.

**LEADER ONE:** The God of our ancestors will never abandon us.

**LEADER TWO:** Be still, and know that God is here.

**ALL:** Let us rejoice.

**LEADERS ONE AND TWO:** Let us worship God.

### Opening prayer

Still our hearts, O God,  
and make us aware of your loving presence.

Open our hearts to your teachings,  
that your ways might become our ways  
in every moment of our lives  
and with every beat of our hearts.

### Prayer of confession

*Take photographs of your community such as a cityscape, farmland, or situations where there is a need. Using a projection program, project these local images one at a time. Prior to the spoken prayer, invite the congregation into a time of silence as these pictures are projected and instrumental music is played.*

God, when we stand at the edge of brokenness  
and allow our questions of faith  
to distance ourselves from you and others,  
forgive us and free us.

When the ways we live as the church  
limit our ability to offer compassion,  
forgive us and free us.

When we try to be “holy”  
without changing the way we are with others,  
forgive us and free us.

### Assurance of pardon

*Have a soloist sing “Spirit of Life” or a song about God’s forgiving and merciful love.*

The face of God we seek is a face of compassion,  
steadfast in love, and longing to forgive.  
Receive the power of God’s compassion  
so that we might have the capacity for love.

## Engage

### Scripture readings

 **John 8:31–36**

Invite someone to portray Jesus and read this paraphrase of the gospel text responsively with the congregation.

**JESUS:** If you obey my teaching, you are really my

disciples; you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.

**ALL:** We are descendants of Abraham, and we have never been anybody’s slaves. What do you mean, then, by saying we will be free?

**JESUS:** I am telling you the truth; everyone who sins is a slave of sin. A slave does not belong to a family



### Revised Common Lectionary (Yr B)

Jeremiah 31:31–34

Psalm 46

Romans 3:19–28

**John 8:31–36**

**Liturgical colour:**  
red

### Music Suggestions

#### Spirit of Life

Carolyn McDade, Grace Lewis-McLaren; Seasons Songbook, vol. 7

#### Come and Seek the Ways of Wisdom

Ruth Duck, Donna Kasohm; Seasons Songbook, vol. 7

#### In Full Flight

Sean Gilbert and Jill Scott; Seasons Songbook, vol. 6

#### We Come to the Hungry Feast

Ray Makeover

#### Be Still and Know

John Bell

#### Grace Alone

Scott Wesley Brown and Jeff Nelson

#### A Mighty Fortress Is Our God

Martin Luther

#### Christ Is Made the Sure Foundation

Traditional Latin





permanently, but a son or daughter belongs there forever. If the Son sets you free, then you will be truly free.

## Opening the word with children

### Always being reformed

Gather with the children near the door to the worship space. Tell them today is Reformation Day. On this day, we remember a minister named Martin Luther who lived a long time ago in a country called Germany. Luther had a vision for the Christian church and how we might live together. Luther wrote down his dream on a piece of paper and nailed this paper on the front door of a church. The leaders of the church read Martin Luther's thoughts and vision and knew the church would have to change in order to live out this dream.

Read some of the visions and hopes for the church people wrote down during the gathering time. Conclude by wondering how the church might need to change, or be reformed, in order to live out these visions and hopes.

### Martin Luther

Bring a picture of Martin Luther and his family from an encyclopedia or the Internet. Introduce his wife, Katherine, and their six children.

Martin Luther loved God. Martin Luther loved Jesus. And Martin Luther knew that many people loved God and Jesus.

But Martin Luther wanted to help the people know God even more. Martin thought that the people did not know all the good things God wanted for them. "I will help the people," Martin said.

"I will write some songs about God's love." And that's what he did. Martin wrote many, many songs that people still sing today.

"I will write books about God's love." And that's what he did. Martin wrote books to help parents and their children learn the story of God's love.

"I will write the Bible again in a language the people will understand." And that's what he did. Martin rewrote the Bible so the people could read it themselves. Martin Luther was very busy. Martin Luther loved God and brought the good news of the Bible to many, many people.

### Proclaiming the Word

In **John 8:31–36** speaks of a freedom we can know in Christ. How do you experience this freedom in your

own life? How does it enable you to "live out Love's passion"? What in the church needs to be reformed so that all people can know this freedom and grace? What is your heartfelt prayer to the reforming, restoring power of the Holy Spirit?

**Romans 3:19–28** is a central text of the Reformation tradition and it encouraged the early reformers to extend God's grace in radical ways. How might the contemporary church extend grace in ways that are radical today? In what ways does your congregation give love to others freely, like a gift?

### Skit – Why Are We Lutherans?

**Characters:** two youths. In the script they are simply named "One" and "Two" – substitute real names. Encourage the actors to have a bit of fun with this, while still conveying an important message.

**Props:** a backpack containing a lightning bolt cut from cardboard, a Bible, some coins or play money, and a hammer (if possible, an old-style wooden one). A table or chair centre stage is helpful.

**One** enters from one side, wearing backpack. **Two** enters from other side, scratching head and looking puzzled.

**ONE:** Hey, (name), what's wrong? You look kind of confused.

**TWO:** I am. Somebody called me a name.

**ONE:** What kind of name?

**TWO:** They called me a "Lutheran."

**ONE:** (laughing) That's not so bad.

**TWO:** But I don't know what it means. Just what is a Lutheran?

**ONE:** Well, (name), you're in luck. I happen to have some answers right here in my backpack. (Takes off backpack and sets it down on table/chair. Takes out lightning bolt.)

**TWO:** Gee, what's that for?

**ONE:** This is part of our story. Long, long ago, there was a child named Martin Luther. Back in Martin Luther's time, people believed that God would punish them for every mistake they made. Martin, like everyone else, was scared of God.

**TWO:** You mean, if I didn't clean my room or didn't finish my homework, God would zap me with a lightning bolt?

**ONE:** That's the idea. So, one day, there was a big storm.

**TWO:** Let me guess – Martin got hit by a real lightning bolt.

**ONE:** Not quite. But he was scared. And so he made a promise to God, "If you save me from the storm,





I'll become a monk."

**Two:** Okay. But why are we called Lutherans?

**One:** I'm getting to that. As a monk, Martin begged for the poor, studied, and worked scrubbing floors. He was trying to please God. Martin even went to Rome and climbed stairs on his knees believing it would please God. (*Takes out Bible.*) And, Martin spent lots of time reading the Bible. More than anything else, Martin kept wondering, "Will God really forgive me?"

**Two:** Wow.

**One:** (*Takes out money.*) Remember how everyone was scared of God? Well, people thought that they could be forgiven if they bought something called an indulgence. It was a way of paying money and being told you were forgiven.

**Two:** That seems kind of strange.

**One:** That's exactly what Martin Luther thought. "Hey, wait a minute," he said (or something like that). "This doesn't make sense. I've been reading the Bible. And the Bible says something very different."

**Two:** So what did Martin Luther do about it?

**One:** (*Takes out hammer. Two shows a shocked expression.*)

Martin Luther wrote a whole bunch of reasons why it was wrong to sell forgiveness. And why we don't have to earn God's forgiveness – because it's a free gift from God. God forgives us because God loves us. We don't have to earn it. In fact, Martin Luther discovered, we *can't* earn it. So he wrote all these things down – 95 things, in fact. They were called "theses," and when Martin was finished, he nailed them to the church door so that people could read them.

**Two:** So, that's why we're Lutherans. Because we learned what Martin Luther learned?

**One:** Kind of, yeah.

**Two:** Is that all you have in your bag?

**One:** Just one more thing. (*Two picks up bag, looks in it; sees nothing; shakes bag upside down.*)

**Two:** I don't see anything in there.

**One:** Oh, you can't see it. But it's there. It's everywhere. It's God's love. It's all around us. Martin Luther taught us that. Let's go spread some around. (*They exit together.*)

## Respond

### Prayers of the people

Reforming God, we give you thanks  
for your forgiveness and your blessing.  
We pray for ourselves and your church  
throughout the world.

Fill us with a spirit of openness to your Spirit,  
to hear and receive your promises  
and to keep our covenant with you.

Where we are corrupt, purify us.

Where we are in error, direct us.

Where we are in need, provide for us.

Where we are divided, reunite us.

And where we are close-minded,  
reform us and make us new.  
We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

### Offertory prayer

Giver of Life,  
prosper the work of our hands in faith.  
Prosper the work of our gifts  
offered in gratitude.  
Prosper the joy of our life  
in following the Christ.

## Bless

*Invite people to take one of the visions for the church that were posted during the gathering time.*

May the warmth of God's presence go with us all.

May the light of God's law bring us joy in relationships.  
May we dance in community, worshipping God.  
Go forth in presence, in joy, in community.

## Special Day Commentary



### October 31 – Reformation Day

On the night of October 31, 1517, Martin Luther nailed 95 theses to the castle church door in Wittenberg, Germany, signalling the beginning of what became known as the Protestant Reformation. Accordingly, this date has significance for churches of the reformed tradition.

Luther chose this night knowing that many

people would be attending church the next day – All Saints Day – and would thus read his statements of concern about the church. Some Protestant churches not of the reformed tradition choose October 31 (or the Sunday prior) to honour "Saints of the Reformation Era," broadening the observance to include others.

