

## Reformation and Reconciliation

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### Introduction

At the center of Christianity lies the doctrine that God became human in Jesus of Nazareth. We call that the incarnation, and we celebrate it at Christmas. The doctrine of the incarnation was one of the breaking points between us and our Jewish parents because it led, in time, to the notion that Jesus was divine, and to Jews, the only thing divine is God. If God is divine and Jesus is divine then you have two gods, not one, and the Jewish people have always been strict monotheists – one God and only one – and so we split from our Jewish roots.

About 1500 years later, we split again, this time amongst ourselves in western Europe. That split came to be called the Protestant Reformation, and this past summer a group of 20 of us, members and friends of Faith Church, went to visit the sites where much of that split occurred. We did so because it's easy for religious folk like us to forget that the God of whom we have any knowledge always works in real time and in real space and with real people.

It's tempting to forget that Jesus, his twelve apostles, his hundreds of disciples, his thousands of fellow Jewish believers, his tens of thousands of opponents, the saints and martyrs, the church fathers and mothers, the reformers of the sixteenth century – they were all flesh-and-blood people, just as we are, trying to make sense of what they believed to be God's call to them in the midst of a world that seemed as harsh and chaotic and beautiful to them as ours seems to us.

To walk the streets that Luther and Zwingli and Calvin walked, to look around the walls of the room where the entire New Testament was first translated into a modern European language, so that ordinary people could understand what was happening in church, or to explore the church buildings themselves to see what shaped our spiritual ancestors week after week – these were the reminders of that sacred history through which we believe God worked and continues to work to make the church of Jesus Christ more of what Christ intended us to be. That's why we went to Europe – that, and to have fun!

Since today is the Sunday when we commemorate the Protestant Reformation, Andrew and Ken Vogt and Ed Jacquet are going to share with us now some of their thoughts and photographs from our trip.

### Conclusion

Thank you, Ken, Andrew, and Ed.

I hope what you've seen and heard during the sermon time this morning has helped to make more real for you the world in which the Christian church tried to make itself more

faithful, because we remain part of that world and we are the living heirs of that work. We remain a reformation in progress. Although, in church history courses, the Protestant Reformation is said to have begun on Oct. 31, 1517, when Luther nailed his ninety-five theses to the door of Wittenberg castle church, and ended on Oct. 24, 1648, with the signing of the last of the treaties known as the Peace of Westphalia, all of us who are part of the church know that the work of reformation never really ends.

Our Reformed ancestors – Zwingli, Calvin, Bucer, and many others – realized early on that they were part of a process that would outlive all of them, just as the church that you and I are part of – the Big Church – will outlive all of us. And they knew that such a church as that is always in need of repair. The slogan they adopted to keep themselves both humble and on track was *Ecclesia Reformata semper reformanda est* – the Reformed Church is always being reformed.

That reformed and reforming church is not, finally, the buildings we saw in Europe but it is, rather, the people sitting in our sanctuary this morning, and in sanctuaries like ours all around the world. We are the church, as our UCC Statement of Faith puts it, that God seeks in holy love to save from aimlessness and sin. Our mission is nothing less and nothing more than to be co-creators with God of a redeemed creation. We believe that our best hope of succeeding in that redeeming work is by growing more and more into the image and likeness of God we see in Jesus the Christ. The world doesn't need more Christians, it needs better Christians, and whether that need is met will largely be up to us.