

## “Doers of Awesome Deeds”

Exodus 34:1-10

Reformation Sunday

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It all really began with a really loud pound, pound, pounding on a really big church sanctuary door. The person doing the pounding was a thirty-four year old once described as “a tough, four-square man of peasant stock, with deep-set disturbing eyes and a character as open as daylight.”<sup>i</sup> Some might say he was quite typical of his German ethnicity. This gregarious man’s name was Martin, and the pounding was the sound of his hammer striking the nails that hung in place a long paper list of 95 complaints against the church leadership of his day. The date Martin decided to express his anger and frustration in this way is interesting to note. It was on what we call Halloween, October 31<sup>st</sup> of the year 1517. Four hundred and ninety years ago!

The pounding really started in Martin’s head and heart. The more he studied and the more he taught the Bible, the more he became convinced that the church was not working the way God intended. He realized with great clarity that Christians in his day were being taught all sorts of rules and regulations that were not at all found in the Bible. In other words, they were being told to do things that God didn’t command.

For example, people were taught that if you paid a certain amount of money, the church would issue a certificate guaranteeing that you would have a place in heaven; kind of like buying a ticket for the trip up North. Martin -- his full name was Martin Luther -- knew well from reading his Bible that Jesus, the Son of God, had paid the price of his very life in order to open heaven’s gates to all God’s children for free. This business of having to pay an entrance fee was a false teaching and it made Martin angry, so angry he decided to do something about it. That’s when he wrote down everything he saw needing correction and decided to hang it on the door of the church in the town of Wittenburg. A really radical thing to do! But he had to get people’s attention; he had to say “Boo!” on that All Hallows Eve in a way that everyone would take notice.

Like a potter taking a piece of clay and pulling it apart so as to put it back together again according to a Master Creator’s design, Martin Luther set out to re-form the Church.

I believe one of the things that inspired him to act out so boldly was that he had read the Book of Exodus. In particular, he had read how God inspired Moses to re-

form the way people worshipped and lived out their faith. And I assume he knew the tenth verse of chapter 34, which tells us of God promising to do awesome deeds with us. Moses, with God Almighty at his side, was a doer of awesome deeds; Martin knew he could be too.

How about you? Are you, with God's gracious help, and through reading and being taught the Bible, also a doer of awesome deeds? Thanks to Martin and to everyone who followed his lead -- a movement which gave birth to the Protestant branch of the church family tree, of which we Presbyterians are a part -- we have a way of governing the church that is firmly based on the Bible. We have the freedom to read, to live out and to defend God's will and God's way as we understand it in the Old and New Testaments. So our Bible reading and study should never be thought of as just a boring thing we have to do; it should be regarded as an adventurous journey of how to live as a Christian in the world! It's the map of why, how and where to do awesome deeds because of God's amazing love for us and our deep love for God.

I'm not saying we will all go do something as bold as Martin Luther did. Awesome deeds for God are done *with* God and in many different ways.

One of the people most special to me who did an awesome deed of holy love for God was a woman named Ruth. Ruth was the summer program director for nearby Camp Johnsonburg when I began working there in college. She was the person who first taught me how to be a counselor. Most importantly, though, she taught me about how Christians are a really big mix of people. They don't all look and act alike. Everyone is loved by God for who they are and everyone has gifts to give to God. She taught me this because this is what the Bible teaches. And her impact on my life at that time ... in words and in hugs ... was an awesome deed because it inspired me to teach other people the same Good News. God worked with Ruth to reform my understanding of what a Christian is, and, honestly, to reform my life, and I wanted God to work with me in the lives of other people. This is one strong reason why I'm here before you today as a Minister of the Word and Sacrament.

I had to wait until my summer job in college to feel inspired to be a doer of awesome deeds for the Lord. This is because I didn't go to Sunday School as a kid. I was not blessed to receive a Bible in third grade and then have the chance to bring it with me to class each week with teachers who were eager for me to know Jesus. I did not participate in a confirmation class, nor did I have anything to do with any youth fellowships. I share this today because it's important to know that while it's never too

late to adventure into the faith of the Bible, I'm still more convinced it's better to begin early, to have that foundation in place before and then during teenage years and young adulthood. So giving out Bibles today ... what a real pleasure! From the bottom of my heart, I can say it is not just something I do as part of my job ... it's an awesome deed for God! It's a way of helping Jesus knock on young hearts and continue the reformation of sin in their lives and the world.

Speaking of Jesus, listen for a moment to something I read in a book called The Gospel According to Starbucks. In chapter two it reminds us that "Jesus never traveled more than eighty miles from his boyhood home, but no one would accuse him of living on a small scale. With Jesus, even the smallest act or the simplest story was done on a grand scale ... Jesus, more than anyone else, shows us what it means to live with a grande passion."<sup>ii</sup>

With the right-sized passion in our hearts, we can all honor Jesus with our words and deeds, those both small and great. And to keep this love in our hearts pumping really strongly, we need faithful friends to help support us as we seek to understand the Bible and all the ways God lives with us. We need such friends our entire life journey, from first to final breath. We need to be active in Christian community. Usually, however, there is a big tension in American society between church involvement and other social activities. It's a tension known and perhaps felt most powerfully in our youth.

Consider the witness of Rachel Harris, a girl I read about this past week. From the sixth grade on she was involved with the youth group of Memorial Drive Presbyterian Church in Houston, Texas. Her involvement did not start easily. She says, "When I first joined the youth group, it was hard. I didn't have any friends in the group and didn't know if I would fit in. Most of my friends at school didn't believe in God. So I felt dumb trying to act like a Christian around them." But Rachel committed herself to keep going, I believe with much support from family, and before long realized she had new friends who really helped her deal with life and it's always increasing pressures. Surrounding yourself at any age with faithful friends is always an awesome deed.

Look around you here in this sanctuary today. We are all in the company of Christian friendship. We all learn the Good News of the Bible from one another at every age. God is always starting re-formations in our lives. Jesus is always asking us to go out and do awesome deeds -- deeds that help us love ourselves, our neighbors and

our world, and that keep the Church of every age true to the love of God we read about in the Bible.

Can you hear the pound, pound, pounding in your heart and on the church door? Let's answer it and keep going strong for more faithful adventures! Let's begin, especially, in a few moments, when we'll share a meal together that going to give us strength and hope and a real sense of being one big family with God. Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> Owen Chadwick, The Reformation, p. 43.

<sup>ii</sup> Leonard Sweet, The Gospel According to Starbucks, p. 19