

Bells, Smells, and the Reformation

By Rev Todd Farnsworth

1 Kings 1: 3-10

Solomon showed his love for the Lord by walking according to the instructions given him by his father David, except that he offered sacrifices and burned incense on the high places. 4 The king went to Gibeon to offer sacrifices, for that was the most important high place, and Solomon offered a thousand burnt offerings on that altar. 5 At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon during the night in a dream, and God said, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you." 6 Solomon answered, "You have shown great kindness to your servant, my father David, because he was faithful to you and righteous and upright in heart. You have continued this great kindness to him and have given him a son to sit on his throne this very day. 7 "Now, Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David. But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties. 8 Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number. 9 So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?" 10 The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this

Solomon showed his love for the Lord by walking according to the instructions given him by his father David, except that he offered sacrifices and burned incense on the high places. Those words seem pretty innocuous on the surface, however, they point to a dramatic shift in power for Israel. Before King Solomon and his father King David, there was King Uzziah. Uzziah trespassed at the altar and tried to assume the religious

role of priest for the people by burning incense to God at the altar. God apparently didn't want church and state intermingling and the story goes, that Uzzy was punished with leprosy for his sin. King David didn't want his family to suffer a similar fate, so made his children priests from the get-go. It was kind of a workaround for the problem. Very on-brand for King David. So, into the world of religion stepped King Solomon. Burning incense. Entering holy spaces as if he owned the place...which he did. Assuming the role of high priest for the people, as well as the role of being their king! It was a heady mix of powers and one that the people at the top were happy to perpetuate. The powers gave them a LOT of control over their people's lives. In fact, for 1600 years the monarchy played an important role in religion. They built temples, declared feast days, created national religions, introduced the ringing of bells to announce special times in the service around 400AD, and put leaders in place who echoed their interests. In 1500AD the leaders were known far and wide as Bishops and Popes. They had inordinate power over the lives of the people. They dictated the language that people could access God by, and how much it cost to get into good favor with God. Very different from our pledge drive, by the way, because in 1517 something happened that changed the holy dynamic...a little game began, called: *Bells, Smells, And the Reformation!* And being that this is the day before the great Reformation began, I thought we could play.

All of you on this side will indicate you want to answer a question about the big change that began in 1517, by waving your hands back and forth while saying, DING DONG (you're the bells.)

All of you on this side will indicate you want to answer a question by rolling your hands upward and saying WHOOSH (you're the smells). Got it?

- 1. In 1517 Martin Luther, a scholar, began wondering about the practices of his faith. What church did Martin Luther belong to?** Roman Catholic church. Everyone who practiced Christianity was RC.
- 2. . True or False:** Martin Luther wanted to start a new religion.
False. He wanted to address problems that he saw within the RC church.
- 3. How many problems did Martin Luther want to address?**
95. Legend has it that after writing the 95 concerns, he nailed them to the door of the Wittenburg Church. Luther himself made no mention of nailing the theses to the church door in 1517 or afterward, only saying that he sent his theses to the Archbishop of Mainz. It does make a pretty good story, though.
- 4. True or False:** One of the problems Martin Luther wanted to discuss involved using bells and smells in worship. False.
Martin Luther believed that the senses were an important part of a person's faith experience. He advocated the hearing of the Word and the tasting of the elements of Communion.
- 5. Church fundraising has always been important. One of the issues that Martin Luther addressed was the "selling of indulgences." Did this practice involve the selling of:** A. Devil's food cakes at church fairs? B. Raffle tickets to Yankee's World Series games? C. Writs that shortened one's time in purgatory for committing sins? C. Clergy sold parishioners reduced punishments for themselves or loved ones, that God would later dole out.

6. **True or False:** Luther's Protests were well received by the Roman Catholic Church. False-ish. Although the RC church excommunicated Martin Luther for his bold thinking, they later undertook their own Counter Reformation to consider ways in which they could do things differently. The rc church focused on art and music to connect with the people.
7. **True or False:** Martin Luther believed that faith should be guided by one's personal relationship with God and access to the Bible. True. He did not believe a priest or intercessor was required for faith. His hope was to reduce the role the priest played and create a more level playing field of faith.
8. **If you were living in England in 1500, what language would the priest be using to deliver the sermon?** Latin. All masses at Roman Catholic Churches were spoken in Latin until 1965...three years after I was born. Luther advocated that worship be in the tongue of the congregation so that cpngregants could have understanding of God's word.
9. **By 1521 a group known as Anabaptists had begun to branch away from Luther's teachings, especially around:** A: when to hold Easter services. B: what costume the minister should wear at Halloween. C: The role of women in the church. C: Anabaptists decried the second class citizen role of women in the RC and church originating from Luther's teachings. The United Church of Christ traces it's spiritual roots to the Anabaptists which is why we were one of the first churches to ordain women.

10. **Luther believed that everyone should have access to the Bible. What invention helped implement that belief?** The printing press. Although there were people who sought reform in the church before Martin Luther, the timing of his complaints matched the invention of the printing press. Martin Luther's *95 Theses* were popularized through print, as were his other writings which were then translated and printed elsewhere, inspiring a wider movement outside of Germany. Women like Argula von Grumbach or **Marie Dentiere** would have had no public voice if not for the printing press, and it was also used effectively by Jeanne d'Albret in advancing the Protestant message during the **French Wars of Religion**. Translations of the Bible, commentaries on scripture, and attacks on the Catholic Church – as well as by the Church on Protestant sects – were all made possible by mass-produced books and pamphlets. The popularity of these religious works in print contributed to a rise in literacy in Europe, which is an aspect of the Reformation often highlighted.
11. **The Reformation played a major role in people's lives by encouraging the lowest class to believe in the hope of a new order in which they would have greater autonomy. What could go wrong?** A. The Eighty Year War. B. The Thirty Year War which included the death of over 8 million people. C. Destruction of Art throughout Europe. D. The Great Cookie Packing Debate of 2021 during which the merits of distributing cookies during Advent or Valentine's day was discussed and debated for no less than 22 days. E. All of the above. E.

12. Because of Luther's emphasis on the individual's relationship with God as sacred, King Solomon and his heirs were replaced by the likes of Claire Yergau, Mary Alenstein, and Jim Stewart. Ew. Which form of government based itself on Luther's teachings? A. Dictatorship. B. Democracy. C. Monarchy. B. The Founding Fathers of our country, though not Puritans in any sense, would base their form of government on the church government the colonists were most familiar with. The structure followed by the Quakers, who also influenced the development of modern democracy in the United States, came directly from the Protestant rejection of a hierarchy, which encouraged democratic idealism and government.

Let's count up the points and see who won, the bells or the smells?
Ohh, that's right, we're a Protestant church and everyonwins...Weir at least has equal access to the prize! We all have access to God through our study of the Bible and prayers. We all have the wisdom of Solomon to sort out by faith how we choose to live our lives. Men. Women. Children. Everyone wins!

I'll have a prize bucket at the door when you leave.

Today is Reformation Sunday. Let's rejoice in the journey that has brought us to this day of worship, in Jesus' name. Amen.

