Prayer
Scripture: Psalm 110
Hymn: 326 "A Mighty Fortress"

THE NINETY-FIVE THESIS: The Theses moved Luther from the monastery, the school room and the local pulpit to the center of the stage or of the arena. Tetzel and the indulgence peddlers had declared that even if one had violated the Virgin Mary an indulgence could save him from punishment and that indulgences were effective even for the dead—the moment the coin rattled in the coffer, the soul would spring out of purgatory. Luther prepared the Theses in the usual style of challenges for debate in the academic community. He nailed them to the door of the Castle Church on the Eve of All Saints' Day (October 31, 1517) knowing that multitudes would flock to the church the following day to revere the Elector's collection of relics. Frederick intended his to be the finest collection in all Europe. It contained about 17,443 relics, requiring twelve aisles for display. A prayer before each relic and a stipulated contribution for the church could shorten the stay in purgatory some 1,744,300 years. The collection included a tooth of St. Jerome, four pieces of St. Chrysostom, six of St. Bernard, four of St. Augustine, four hairs of the Virgin Mary, three pieces of her cloak, four pieces of her girdle, seven pieces of her veil sprinkled with the blood of her Son, one piece of the swaddling clothes of Jesus, thirteen pieces of his crib, one whip of straw from the manger of Bethlehem, one piece of gold brought by the Wise Men, three pieces of their myrrh, one strand of Jesus' beard, one of the nails driven through his hands, one piece of bread from the Last Supper, one piece of the stone on which Jesus stood when he ascended to heaven, one twig of Moses' burning bush, and one thorn certified to have pierced the Savior's brow.

Luther called for debate on the extent of the value of indulgences. They might cancel punishment decreed by the pope but he denied the power of the pope over purgatory. He objected to the extravagant claim of Tetzel and the peddlers. He objected to the object of the expenditure of the money. He raised the question of the true nature of repentance and called for consideration for the welfare of the sinner. In the first proposition Luther asserted that repentance is the work of a whole lifetime. One good pastor would do the people more good than building St. Peter's. If the pope wanted St. Peter's he should build it with his own money for he was richer than Cressus. It would be better to sell St. Peter's and give the money to the poor who were being fleeced by the hawkers of indulgences. If the pope knew what the vendors were doing he would rather St. Peter's should lie in ashes than that it should be built out of the blood and hide of his sheep.

The pope cannot reduce penalties imposed by God. The pope has no power over purgatory. He can only remove the penalties he himself has imposed. Only by his prayers could the pope help those in purgatory. If the pope could free the souls in purgatory he should free them out of pure charity rather than demanding money.

Luther denied the extra merits of the saints—no one would enter heaven on his own merits, but only by grace. Indulgences encouraged people to sin. Christians should find their cross and seek to enter heaven by following Christ through many tribulations.
THE STORM RAISED BY THE THESSES:

The Theses were copied, put on the printing press and scattered over Europe. Luther said that in fourteen days they had flown all over Germany. A contemporary, Myconius, declared that in four weeks they were diffused throughout all Christendom "as though the angels were the postmen."

Multitudes of the common people welcomed Luther as a great liberator and hero. The Humanists saw in him a leader of courage and promise. Many princes saw in him one who would challenge and end the tyranny of the pope. Those who wanted reform saw in him the long awaited leader. Dr. Fleck who had preached the inauguration sermon at the beginning of the University of Wittenberg declared "The man has come at last!" He sent Luther a letter of approval.

The students at Wittenberg hailed Luther with enthusiasm. Most of the professors were solidly behind him but feared for his safety. Dr. Schurf of the law faculty begged him not to write against the pope. The faculty at Erfurt felt he had fallen into sinful pride. Luther sent copies of the Theses to professors in several of the universities. He also sent a copy to Albert of Mainz pleading with the prince to stop the sale of indulgences.

Weeks passed and no one came forward to debate indulgences. He had a host of critics and bitter enemies. Princes, administrative heads of dioceses and universities assumed from Luther's boldness that he must have the backing of his patron, Elector Frederick, and they did not want to get involved. The faculty at Mainz after discussion recommended that the matter be referred to Rome.

Income from the sale of indulgences dropped. Albert of Mainz consulted the faculty and jurists and sent a copy of the Theses to the pope with the request that Luther be silenced.

Pope Leo X at first did not take the matter seriously. He declared "Friar Martin is a brilliant chap. The whole row is due to the envy of the monks." But as income dropped and charges of heresy from the Dominicans mounted Leo declared, "Luther is a drunken German. He will feel better when he is sober." On February 3, 1518 Pope Leo ordered Venetus, general of the Augustinians, to "soothe and quiet" the man, saying it was better to put out a fire early rather than to delay until it became dangerous. Venetus wrote Staufitz to call his brother to account.

Tetzel lost no time in replying to Luther. In the last days of 1517 he published one hundred-six theses prepared for him by a fellow Dominican, Conrad Wimpina, a theologian of the University of Frankfort. This was followed by fifty more theses. Tetzel was given the degree of licentiate at the end of the year and early in 1518 was made a Doctor of Theology. On January 20 at the convention of the Dominicans at the University of Frankfort Tetzel defended his theses. The Dominicans sent to Rome charges that Luther was preaching heresy and urged the pope to take action against him. In March when eight hundred copies of Tetzel's theses were sent to Wittenberg the students seized them and burned them.

Luther prepared a large Latin defense of his theses, entitled Explanations of the Disputations on the Power of Indulgences and sent it to his bishop, Scultetus, asking for permission to publish it. The bishop delayed to answer. Luther prepared a German sermon, "The Sermon on Indulgence and Grace" which the bishop asked him not to publish. It was circulated in manuscript.

Dr. John Eck of Ingolstadt, who had earlier been friendly toward Luther, bitterly attacked him in a work called "Obeliska", meaning "dagger points," from Origen's use of the sign to denote questionable
statements. Luther replied in his "Asterisks", another term from Origen to denote explanatory notes.

LUTHER AT THE MEETING OF THE AUGUSTINIANS AT HEIDELBERG:

The week after Easter in 1518 Luther left Wittenbeeg to attend the meeting of the Augustinians at Heidelberg. There were rumors that Luther would be assassinated on the way. He had addressed a letter to Frederick asking for protection. Frederick gave him a letter of safe-conduct, warned Staupitz to see that Luther was not carried off or restrained, and sent a letter of recommendation with introductions to those he would visit on the way, including the bishop of Würzburg. Luther set out on foot with a cloister brother. He was well received at every stop including a pleasant visit with Bishop Laurentius of Würzburg. He visited old friends at Erfurt who invited him to ride the rest of the way in their wagon. On April 21 he was welcomed to Heidelberg by Palgrave Wolfgang, invited to dinner along with Staupitz and Lang, was shown the church treasures and the Heidelberg castle.

The Augustinians gave Luther a warm welcome. There were no disciplinary moves against him. Staupitz was elected Vicar-General and Lang was elected Provincial Vicar. The Augustinians customarily ended the meeting with a day of theological disputation on current issues. One of Luther's students, Leonard Beyer, presented the teachings of Luther, in what became the Heidelberg theses which included twenty-eight propositions from theology and twelve from philosophy. Luther was allowed to expound his ideas of justification, grace and indulgences. He attacked scholasticism and Aristotle. The older university professors heard him dingly but still upheld scholasticism. One professor declared that if the peasants heard his teaching, they would stone him.

Luther made two valuable converts at Heidelberg. One was John Bretz who would become the leader of the reformation in Wurttemberg. The other was Martin Bucer, a young Dominican who had been permitted to attend the sessions. He would become the leader of reform in Strassburg and one of the great debaters of the movement. Luther declared that his hopes rested with the younger generation.

After the meeting Luther returned with the members of the Erfurt chapter. He visited his old teacher, Usingen, but failed to win him to his position. His old teacher, Trutvetter, refused to see him. Luther wrote him a letter expressing gratitude for his debt to him and setting forth his convictions. He accidentally met the old teacher the next day only to be bitterly attacked.

Erfurt friends provided a wagon to take him back to Wittenberg where he arrived on May 15. The Sunday following his return he preached a sermon entitled "Sermon on the Power of Excommunication." The power of excommunication comes from God. Unjustly imposed it does not exclude the sufferer from the inner spiritual life of the Church. To endure such a ban is the noblest of service.

THE POPE MOVES AGAINST LUTHER:

When the Augustinians failed to discipline Luther the Dominicans increased their demands for the pope to act. They sent reports of his sermons to Rome.

Luther prepared his Explanations of the Disputations on the Power of Indulgences for the press and sent a copy to Staupitz with the request that he send it to the pope. Luther dedicated the work to the pope. He put himself in the hands of the pope: "Prostrate at the feet of Your Holiness, I offer myself and all that I am and have. Your voice I will recognize as the voice of Christ, who rules and speaks in you. If I have deserved it I shall not hesitate to die."
He appealed to Cicero and truth. He declared that he had been moved by the excesses of the purveyors of indulgences but had not intended such a storm but only to arouse academic debate. He mentioned the threats against him and declared that as one of the poor he had no fear for the poor who had nothing to lose. The only thing left to him was his poor body and if they destroyed it they would only make him poorer by one or two hours of life.

Luther enlarged on his attack on the value of indulgences, the power of the pope to remit sins, and the power of the keys. He urged the pope to reform the church. He issued a call to leave scholastic theology and to return to a theology of the cross.

The Dominicans held a meeting in Rome and again charged Luther with heresy. Pope Leo finally moved. He appointed a Dominican, Prierias, Commissioner of the Sacred Palace, Bishop of Ascoli, and Censor of Books, to collect and examine the works of Luther. Prierias reported that Luther was clearly a heretic—anyone who said the pope could not do what he did was a heretic. The pope commissioned Prierias to prepare a refutation of Luther. Prierias prepared a Latin dialogue, "Against the Presumptuous Theses of Martin Luther concerning the Power of the Pope." He declared that he had completed it in three days. The universal church is virtually the church of Rome and the head of the church is the pope. The church cannot err, nor can its head err. Whoever does not follow the Roman church and the pope is a heretic.

The chief judge of the Dominicans in Rome, Chiunacci, issued a summons to Luther to appear in Rome within sixty days after the notice reached Wittenberg. The summons and Prierias' dialogue reached Wittenberg in early August.

Luther published the dialogue with his answer, "Response to the Dialogue of Sylvester Prierias on the Power of the Pope." He declared that it had taken him only two days to prepare the reply. If the pope is the church what of all the awful scandals in the papacy—the bloody wars of Julius II and the tyranny of Boniface VIII? Luther declared that the only church he knew was in Christ and its representative was a council. How could it be heretical to call for academic debate of questions that had not been settled?

Luther appealed to Frederick to save him from Rome.

Pope Leo sent orders to Cajetan who was in Augsburg to arrest Luther at once and if necessary to call on the Emperor and the German princes for help. He also sent an appeal to Frederick, reminding him of his obligations to the Catholic faith, and calling on him to arrest "a certain son of iniquity, Friar Martin Luther" that he charged with forgetting his cloth and profession and sinfully vaunting himself in the Church of God. He also ordered Volta, whom he had made General of the Augustinians earlier in the year, to arrest Luther. He also called on Hacker, the leader of the Augustinians who opposed Staupitz, to arrest Luther.

FREDERICK PROTECTS LUTHER:

Frederick's reply to the pope was that he would not permit Luther to be taken to Rome. A German deserved a trial before his peers in his own country. Luther could only be tried before the Reichstag in Augsburg. The pope dared not move against Frederick.