

Building Wholehearted Disciples of Jesus



Luther: monk, prophet, outlaw

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The 500th Anniversary of the Reformation

Luther

- He was called a “wild pig” by the most powerful man in the world at that time, Pope Leo X.
- It was in the Papal Bull, *Ex Surge Domine*, that excommunicated Luther.
- The Bull, or charge, against Luther, began with these words: “Rise up O Lord, Defend your Cause, for there is a wild boar loose in your Vineyard.”
- What had caused such a strong reaction from the Pope?
- Martin Luther had nailed 95 theses, or disputations, or arguments against the Church of Rome on October 31st 1517. At first the Pope had thought nothing of it and said, “he’s just a drunken German who will change his mind when his is sober.”
 - But something happened that no one expected.
 - Luther wrote the 95 arguments in Latin, the trade language of the learned and the church, and had been intended for an intellectual debate.
 - But someone took the manuscript and translated it into German and all over Germany and Europe the common people were reading what Luther wrote.
 - And now, this small piece of parchment had turned from a tiny little email spark by an Augustinian monk into “trending” conflagration, a blazing fire that was burning from a small town in Wittenberg, in Saxony Germany all the way to Rome, the Capitol of Christendom.

- And what had seemed to be a small insignificant matter, from a peasant monk living in an inconspicuous town in an insignificant part of Germany, was turning into a movement that was creating fear in the highest echelons of the Roman Catholic Church.
- Over the next 30 years this man would be the most revered and most hated man Europe had ever produced.
- So, who was this “wild boar,” this “wild pig” from Saxony and what did he do that created such fear and hatred from the Pope in Rome?

Martin Luther

- Born in 1483 to an enterprising peasant family.
- He grew up under a demanding father who wanted his son to marry, have children, become a successful lawyer and provide for him in his old age.
- Martin’s father, Hans, was a man of great intelligence and fire. Though he had started out as a miner and he had become a successful entrepreneur in the mining business. He owned several smelting works.
- Luther grew up with a love hate relationship that affected his view of God early on.
- Luther, following the dreams of his father that he become a successful lawyer, was sent to the best schools of the time. On returning to his college after securing his masters degree, he was caught up in a tremendous lightning storm.
 - In that moment with the trees moaning, rain pelting, thunder clapping and a lightning bolt hit so close that he was unsure if he was dead for alive. The 21 year old

Luther shouted out, “Help me St Anne, I will become a monk”

- Upon returning to college, he sold his law book and two weeks later held a farewell dinner. He said, “Tonight you see me, but never again!”
- Even as they tried to dissuade him, Luther’s mind was fixed.
- The next morning he entered the Augustinian cloister and presented himself for holy orders.
- What Luther would discover about the Medieval Catholic Church was that God the Father and Jesus the Son were presented, not as love, but as a fierce judge.
- This is what had led to the veneration of Mary as the soft touch of the Trinity, and the role of praying to the saints, who were only human, yet lived holy lives. They were the ones you could pray to, they would understand our problems better than God.

Luther’s Pursuit of Heaven

- One thing you have to understand about Luther is that his personality was wholehearted and all in with whatever he did. When he took the vows of the Augustinian cloister, he was total in his commitment.
 - He followed the Canon Law of the Catholic Church and the Augustinian order to the letter of the law.
 - At that time, the orders of the church were for those people who were consumed with a desire for salvation. There was no better way to secure your eternal foundation in the next life but by earning that salvation in this life.
 - It was all about earning God’s favor through a rigorous set of laws that the church had set up.
 - No one was as passionate as Luther in his vigorous pursuit for holiness and perfection.

- Luther’s overactive mind was constantly finding ways in which he had fallen short. He was constantly honest about his shortcomings and sinful thoughts. If he went to confession and then walked away and thought of one more thing he hadn’t confessed he would run back to the confessional. There was a belief that if you died without confessing a sin, or died “in one’s sins,” you were sent to hell.
- The Penal System that the church had worked out over the centuries was a bit complicated, but what was clear was that the priest had the authority of the Church, and the Church had the authority of God, to determine what one must do to be forgiven, to clear one’s slate of sins.
 - First of all, one must go to confession every day. And Luther did this up to 6 hours at a time, several times a day
 - Next, the priest would give the confessor penance, or something he must do to be forgiven and this involved “hail Mary’s” and “Our Father’s” that the person must do for forgiveness.
 - This came from a centuries old theory of the Church that there was a “treasury of merit” that came from the saints and Jesus. The church taught that some special people had in their lives done so many good things that they had accumulated “merits” beyond what they needed and they had placed these merits into a heavenly bank/treasury so to speak—they were in the black, not the red like most of us. So all the merits of these holy people, plus Jesus, plus Mary, plus the Apostles amounted to this huge surplus that the sinful could draw on.
- And Luther did it all. He made a pilgrimage to Rome in 1510 and touched the relics, the bones of the saints, to win more indulgences, he crawled the fabled steps of Scala Sancta (holy stairs) that were purported to be the marble stairs of Pilate’s first century palace in Jerusalem, the very stairs Jesus had mounted while on trial. It was here that after crawling the 28 stairs of “our father’s”, Luther, for the first time asked himself, “What if it’s not true?”

- He had forsaken all; he was fasting, laying in the snow with no clothing but it was getting him nowhere.
- He didn't know what to do to untangle his guilt, confusion and inner wrestlings. The agonies of his depression, what in German is called, *Anfechtungen*—this feeling of utter hopelessness.
- He would later write of his hopeless search for perfection and forgiveness, ““If ever a monk got to heaven by his monkery, it was I.” "Christ was given, not for picayune and imaginary transgressions, but for mountainous sins; not for one or two, but for all; not for sins that can be discarded, but for sins that are stubbornly ingrained.”
- And at his worst place emotionally and spiritually, Luther began to read his Bible.
 - Studying the Bible was unheard of in Medieval times.
 - Not even the Monks read the Bible—they were not allowed even to own a Bible!
 - There were no Bibles for people to read.
 - There were no Bibles in the language of the people.
 - All authority, all knowledge was dispensed by the church and the priests and there was no other access to truth.
 - But Luther, weary with the endless study in the monastery of Aristotle and other philosophers, was desperate to find God and he began to study the Bible in Greek, Hebrew and Latin.
 - Luther was tired of and unsatisfied with the Aristotelian philosophy that engaged the church and wanted to go back to the source, the Word of God.
- Johannes Von Staupitz, his mentor and the head of the Augustinian order, seeing the anxiety of Luther and his genius in Luther and his passion for the Scriptures ordered Luther to take a position in the new university in Wittenberg, Saxony Germany.

Wittenberg

- In 1502, Fredrick the Duke of Saxony, had established a University and he had asked his old friend Staupitz to teach theology there and he wanted to replace himself with this rising genius, Martin Luther.
- In 1514 Luther was not only Professor of Theology and Bible but made the Preacher in the City Church of Wittenberg. (He was also the Vicar General of 11 monasteries.)
- But in 1517, there was an experience that forever changed Luther's life, months before the nailing the famous 95 Theses to the Wittenberg Door, wherein God showed His grace to everything Luther had been agonizing over.
 - This was the moment where the clouds of *Anfechtungen*—his hopelessness and depression—were lifted.
 - Luther wrote about “the Cloaca Experience.”

Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience. I could not believe that he was placated by my satisfaction. I did not love...yes, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners, and secretly, if not blasphemously, certainly murmuring greatly, I was angry with God...Thus I raged with a fierce and troubled conscience. Nevertheless I beat importunately upon St. Paul at that place (Romans 1:17) most ardently desiring to know what Paul wanted...The Holy Spirit gave me this art in [or upon] the cloaca” (p. 95 Medaxis)

- This would become known as the Cloaka or Tower Experience at the Black Cloister in Wittenberg.
- What most of you might not know is that “Cloaka” is the ancient Latin term for “sewer” or “outhouse.”

- There is some speculation that Luther might be referencing the tower at the Black Cloister that also just happened to have an outhouse in the base of the tower.
- We believe that Luther is deliberately playing upon the German grammar “auf” for “in” or “upon” probably half in jest to convey something like “While on the John...God spoke to me in a powerful way.”

Romans 1:17

At last by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, I gave heed to the context of the words, namely, “in it the righteousness of God is revealed,” as it is written, “He who through faith is righteous shall live.” There I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteousness of God is revealed by the gospel, namely the passive righteousness with which the merciful God justifies us by faith...Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates. Thus a totally other face of the entire Scripture showed itself to me. Hereupon I ran through the Scriptures from memory. If also found in other terms an analogy, as the work of God, that is, what God does in us, the power of God, with which he makes us strong, the wisdom of God, with which he makes us wise, the strength of God, the salvation of God, the glory of God.

And I extolled my sweetest word with a love as great as the hatred with which I had before hated the term, “the righteousness of God,” thus that place in Paul for me truly the gate of paradise.” (p. 96-7, *ibid*)

- This was the earthshaking insight that gave Luther the solid foundation from the Bible upon which to base what may well be reckoned the “greatest revolution in human history.”
- Luther had discovered through his own arduous labor and sincere passion for holiness and rightness before God, that he could never do it—he had attempted everything and more.

- He had followed the Catholic Church's Canon Law perfectly.
- He had followed the rules of the Augustinian Order perfectly.
- Yet he had no peace, no joy.
- He was not unlike the perfection of Paul when he wrote, in **Philippians**, . . . ***though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.*** (3:5-8)
- It occurred to Luther that this passage was not talking about the righteousness of God by which God is righteous, but rather that the righteousness of God that has been provided to us—graciously, freely provided to us if we will put our faith in Christ.
- Paul had discovered that faith in Christ and Christ alone releases the righteousness of God, the treasures of all of God's grace and salvation into the believer by faith.
- When we put our trust in Christ, God's righteousness comes over and covers the believer.
- Luther said, "it broke upon my mind that my justification is not established by my own naked righteousness, which will always fall short, but it rests solely and completely on the righteousness of Christ which I cling to by faith."

Galatians 2:8-9

- The hypocrisy of works righteousness and human righteousness was revealed. The curtain of Oz had exposed the fraud of thinking we can somehow earn God's favor through the ecclesiastical levers of the Church.
- For Luther, any appeal to Mary and the saints instead of to Jesus himself became a satanic twisting of holiest and highest truth of scripture. It was therefore, anti-christ to believe such unscriptural teachings. In the end, he came to believe that Satan himself had taken over the church and that somehow God wanted to entrust him, a lowly monk from Wittenberg, with the task of declaring this to the world.
- Luther came to believe that our will was in complete bondage naturally. We cannot do anything anytime anywhere that can make us worthy of God's love and grace. We can never earn his favor or do enough good to warrant heaven. Impossible!
- But when we place our faith in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, HIS righteousness, HIS strength, HIS love and grace is poured into us.
- That we can never be good enough but we can be bad enough to become His disciple.
- He lived the life we could never live; He died the death we could never die, that we might receive His life and live the life we've always wanted.

The Indulgence Controversy

- Johannes Tetzel was a Dominican Friar who would have made a great salesman in our day. Some say he was one of the most persuasive preachers of the 16th century.
 - In 1517 Tetzel had been tasked by Rome to raise the equivalent of billions of dollars for the church for the needed funds to build St. Peter's Basilica in Rome.
 - The financial needs of the Church were pressing and no one better than Tetzel to raise the money through "indulgences."
 - The idea of "Indulgences" came from this Treasury of Merit. This was a ponzy scheme thought up by the Church where, instead of doing penance for your sins, like doing a good deed for someone or saying "Hail Marys" or "Our Fathers", you could purchase merits with money—and of course giving money to the church was a "good work" so it all worked very nicely.
 - ♣ But here's the kicker, these merits bought as indulgences were not placed in the treasury in heaven but rather were yours.
 - ♣ You could spend them any way you wanted. So with my money I could buy an indulgence for a sin I had not even committed yet, but knowing that I would, the indulgence would be my forgiveness for the sin I was going to commit.
 - ♣ Plus, indulgences became a sure fire income stream for the church. It was the Ponzi scheme, capital P, but even better, in the name of God.
 - ♣ It even got better in 1476, when Pope Sixtus IV realized that the market for indulgences could also be extended beyond the living to those multiplied millions who had already died and were suffering in Purgatory.
 - ♣ This was huge untapped market. You could buy your Grandmother Lucy's salvation out of Purgatory by buying indulgences that knocked of like one

thousand years of the flames engulfing Grandma Lucy.

- And no one was better at getting people to buy indulgences than Tetzal:

Listen now, God and St. Peter call you. Consider the salvation of your souls and those of your loved ones departed...Visit the most holy cross erected before you and ever imploring you. Have you considered that you are lashed in a furious tempest amid the temptations and dangers of the world, and that you do not know whether you can reach the haven, not of your mortal body, but of your immortal soul? Make the contribution! They are crying out, "Pity us, pity us. We are in dire torment from which you can redeem us for a pittance." Hear the father saying to the son, "we birthed you, nourished you, brought you up, left you our fortunes and you are so cruel and hard that now you are not willing for so little to set us free. Will you let us lie in the flames?"

Remember that you are able to release them, for As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs

- As Luther's church members began to show him the indulgences granted to them from Tetzal, Luther exploded in anger.
- Luther had reached the point of no return. He retreated into his study in the Black Cloister and wrote and wrote.

On October 31st, the Eve of All Saints Day, the day before Prince Fredrick would open up his relics of dead saints, Luther posted on the Castle Church in Wittenberg, 95 arguments or disputations against the Roman Catholic Church.

- The 95 Theses were a call to the academic community for a scholarly debate on the subject of each disputation.

- It was written in Latin, the language of the scholar—most people could not read or understand Latin.
- They were posted on the church door, the bulletin board of the time.
- It was addressed to Archbishop Albrecht of Mainz, for it was in Albrecht's name that the Indulgences were being peddled. Another sideline to this issue of Indulgences is that Albrecht had bought his bishopric for 23,000 ducas (an astronomical sum) some years before and he needed the money gained through indulgences to subsidize and purchase his position.
- But something happened to the 95 Theses. "The Guttenberg Press," the first movable type printing, had been introduced to Europe less than 75 years before.
 - Someone, and no one really knows got their hands on Luther's parchment, translated it from Latin to German, and printed thousands of copies.
 - Suddenly, the masses in Saxony, outlying German provinces, and then all over Europe could read Luther's disputation. A theological and political conflagration had begun.
- So the Pope demands that the Duke of Saxony, Fredrick the Wise, deliver up Luther to him. Fredrick, knowing that this could only mean that his theologian would be burned at the stake, answers by demanding that Luther get a fair hearing in Germany.
- What followed were several important debates: The Heidelberg Disputation, the Diet at Augsburg and the Leipzig Debate.
- In each debate, the continuing sticking point boiled down to two huge issues: the Roman Catholic Church believed that truth was derived from tradition, church councils and the pope and Luther had come to believe that truth was came from Scripture and Scripture alone: Sola Scriptura.

- It was at Leipzig that Luther made one of his most famous speeches, and he gave it in German,

I assert that a council has sometimes erred and may sometimes err. Nor has a council authority to establish articles of faith. A council cannot make divine right out of that which by nature is not divine right. Councils have contradicted each other, for the recent Lateran Council has reversed the claim of the councils of Constance and Basel that a council is above the pope. A simple layman armed with scripture is to be believed above a pope or a council without it. As for the pope's decretal on indulgences I say that neither the Church nor the pope can establish articles of faith. These must come from scripture.

Diet of Worms

- Luther is voracious in his writing and one pamphlet after another hits the printing press and the message of the Gospel of freedom and grace is going forth:
 - A Treatise on Good Works
 - A Treatise to the Nobility of Germany
 - Babylon Captivity of the Church
 - Freedom of the Christian
- The Pope releases a Bull, an attack, on Luther, *Ex Surge Domine*, that excommunicated Luther, June 15, 1520, and he had 60 days to recant. Luther, upon receiving the bull in October, took the Bull with the Canon Law of the Roman Church, and before a huge crowd, threw it into a bonfire.
- The Pope calls Luther to come to the city of Worms and explain himself. It would be a debate before the most powerful men in the world at the time.
 - The Emperor of the Roman Empire, Charles V.
 - The nobles of Germany and the Empire were all there.

- And one of the great debaters and Catholic theologians of the time, representing the church and the Pope: Von Der Ecken.
- When Luther entered Worms in 1521, over 2000 people cheered his entrance.
- Luther had become a rock star. Through his writings, both theologically and politically, it was said by one Catholic theologian, “9 out of 10 people hail him, and the other 1 says, ‘death to the Pope.’”
- This would be Luther’s last chance to recant or be under the edict of death from Rome.
- He was shown a stack of his books and demanded by Ecken that he recant and pledge his allegiance to Rome.
- On the final day of the debate, which it was not really a debate but an inquisition—for most everyone opposed his views, Von Der Ecken summed it up:

Martin, you have not sufficiently distinguished your works... Your plea to be heard from Scripture is the one always made by heretics... How can you assume that you are the only one to understand the sense of Scripture? Would you put your judgement above that of so many famous men and claim that you know more than they all? You have no right to call into question the most holy orthodox faith... confirmed by the sacred councils, defined by the church... Martin, answer candidly and without horns, do you or do you not repudiate your books and the errors which they contain?

- In answer, Luther gave, what are probably his most famous words and most enduring legacy:

Since then your serene majesties and your lordships seek a simple answer, I will give it in this manner, plain, and unvarnished: Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the

scriptures or clear reason, for I do not trust in the Pope or in the councils alone, since it is well known that they often err and contradict themselves, I am bound to the Scriptures I have quoted, and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. I cannot do otherwise. Here I stand. God help me. Amen.

- All this Luther said, first in German, and then in Latin.
- Von Der Ecken then said, that Luther must put aside his conscience.
- Luther was led out to the taunting Spaniards who had come to Worms with the Emperor. They spat on Luther and shouted that he must be delivered to the flames.
- Among friends and German soldiers, Luther threw up his hands and shouted, “I’ve come through! I’ve come through.”
- And indeed he had. The medieval world and the modern world would be changed forever. Through the coming Protestant Reformation, everything would change.

From a few nails and a piece of parchment in a door in Wittenberg to the highest halls of power, a revolution had begun. Over the next 300 years, the transformation of Germany, Europe, and the new world would be monumental. Here are my Top 10:

1. The belief that salvation is not from our own works or the canon laws of the church but salvation comes to us by the grace of God through faith in Christ alone.
2. The belief that the Bible, not the traditions and creeds of the church, are our standard for faith and practice.
3. The belief that everyone should have the Bible translated into their mother tongue and be able to read it for themselves.

4. The belief in separation of church and state—that the secular government should be separate from the spiritual institution of the church, and that neither should rule over the other.
5. The belief that the worship service should involve the people through congregational singing and the taking of the bread and wine in communion.
6. The belief that doing your work at your job can be worship unto God.
7. The belief that the individual with convictions based in Scripture is more powerful than a despot regime or government.
8. The belief that, in the biblical boundaries of marriage and family, that marriage and sex is holy, beautiful and sacred, a “return to Eden.”
9. The belief that everyone should have access to education and spiritual training, regardless of race or socio-economic condition.
10. The belief that every person need not depend on a professional priest for confession and access to God but, as a result of a personal intimate relationship with Christ, he/she is a priest of his/her home and work.

Luther’s Preface to Romans:

"Faith is a divine work in us which changes us and makes us to be born anew of God...Faith is a living, daring confidence in God's grace, so sure and certain that the believer would stake his life on it a thousand times. This knowledge of and confidence in God's grace makes men glad and bold and happy in dealing with God and all creatures. And this is the work of which the Holy Spirit performed in faith..." Martin Luther, Preface to Romans

It was the reading of this preface that John Wesley heard in May, 1738, where he said, "my heart was strangely warmed" and he was born

again. It was the Methodist revival that Wesley that led a young politician named William Wilberforce to the Lord. It was from Wilberforce that slavery was eventually abolished in England. It was the influence of Wilberforce that led to the abolition movement in America in the 1800's. It was a Black Baptist pastor from Georgia, Michael King, who visited Germany in 1934, who named his son after Martin Luther, who inaugurated the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960's.