

Martin Luther Monologue

Written by Drue Warner on October 31, 2017, in celebration of the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation and Martin Luther

My name is Martin Luther, and I am a monk of the Augustinian order (in Erfurt, Germany). Born in Eisleban, Saxony on Nov. 10, 1483. I have a few announcements I'd like to make.... 95, to be exact! Actually, I'm here to tell you a little bit about my story and how God used a fearful, insecure man like me to bring about the Protestant Reformation. I'm guessing that you may have not even heard about it, and if you did, you probably don't know what it is. That's why I'm here... to tell you the story.

Five hundred plus years ago, on October 31, 1517, I unwittingly started one of the greatest events in all of human history (the Protestant Reformation) by nailing my 95 theses (statements of objection) to the front door of the church in Wittenberg. This was not an uncommon practice. The church door was like the community bulletin board. It was sort of like their version of Facebook! People would post news, "want" ads, and topics for discussion. And, that's what I wanted... conversation!

What came of it was completely unexpected, but desperately needed. The conversation that was started on that day, 500 years ago, resulted in the Reformation of the Church. Today, most people think of that day as Halloween, but to me, that was the day that God saved the Church.

How did it happen? Good question! After 12 years of being the best religious monk that I could be, doing everything I could do to please God (i.e. praying from 4am until late into the evenings, confessing my sins to the priest for up to 6 hours at a time, and following all of the strict rules of the Augustinians), I grew exasperated, exhausted, and angry with God. **I viewed God as a tyrant because He demanded what I could not give.**

But, everything changed for me the day that I was reading in the book of Romans and I came to verse 17 in chapter 1. When I read that ***"the just shall live by faith,"*** it changed my life! I love the Church, but the more I studied the scriptures, the more I realized and became incensed at the many errors the Church was putting forward to the common people, namely the selling of indulgences to purchase salvation with money, rather than to Christ, who has purchased salvation with His blood. **Their message was a false gospel of, "Confess your sins and WORK (to earn favor with God)!"** But, I discovered in the book of Romans that the true gospel message is, ***"Confess your sins, and REST (in the finished work of Christ on our behalf)!"***

And so, I did it. I could not remain quiet. I found a hammer and a few nails, I wrote down 95 problems that I had with the Church, I nailed my writings on the front doors of the Whittenberg Church, declaring that **salvation is obtained, NOT by our own righteousness and good works (we have none!),** but by the righteousness and perfect work of Jesus Christ on our behalf, NOT BY WORKS BUT BY FAITH ALONE.

After several years of debate, discussion, and disagreement, the Roman Church declared me heretic and excommunicated from the church. I thought, for sure, that I would be burned at the stake. I was brought before a formal session in Worms, Germany (known as the Diet of Worms) where I was asked to “recant” of all of my writings.

I knew that an unwillingness to do so would likely result in execution, so I requested 24 hours to pray before I answered. When I returned the next day, my answer was this, ***“Unless I am convinced by Scripture and plain reason - I do not accept the authority of the popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other - my conscience is held captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything. For to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. Amen.”***

I was not executed, because as I was being transported off from the assembly, my friend, Friedrich the Wise, arranged for me to be kidnapped and hidden in the Wartburg Castle (Eisenach). **To disguise myself (I guess you could call it my Halloween costume), I grew a beard and changed my name to Junker Jorge (Knight George)!** It was in the Wartburg Castle that I translated the New Testament, from the original Greek into German, so that the common people could have access to the scriptures. This is still the most common translation used in Germany today.

As the Reformation of the Church began to spread throughout Germany and into Europe, Believers were liberated! Monks and Nuns began to marry and start families. On Easter morning (1523), I actually helped 12 Nuns escape their convent. I was able to reunite them with their parents or help them find husbands to marry... all but one, Katherina von Bura.

Ms. von Bura was the least desirable. Her family did not want her back. She wasn't altogether attractive, was VERY opinionated, and way too feisty for any of my friends to marry. **After trying and trying to find her a husband and with no success, I decided to just marry her myself!** She became my cherished Katie. She was a great mother, an excellent cook, and made the best beer in Whittenberg (at least in my opinion)!

I'm humbled and amazed to have been used by God to reform the Church, and I guess the five things that would probably be my lasting legacy are:

1. Salvation is "by faith alone."
2. The Word of God is our highest authority, not the Pope or the Church.
3. The Bible is accessible to all people, and is understandable (like a mother talking to her child).
4. Congregational singing (**Doctrine engages the head. Singing engages the heart.**)
 - a. My most famous hymn is "A Mighty Fortress (Is Our God)." I wrote it as I was helping so many who were sick and dying from the Black Plague in Whittenberg. As I wrote, I couldn't help but reflect on my time hidden in the safety of the Wartburg Castle and its impenetrable walls and strong tower and Psalm 46 (*"God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear. The LORD Almighty is with us. The God of Jacob is our fortress. – Psalm 46:1, 11).*
5. The priesthood of all believers. Everyone is a minister and is called into ministry wherever it is that He has us (i.e. at home, in school, at work, in our neighborhoods, etc.).

In closing, I must tell you that I come from a long line of men and women who have kept this great good news of the gospel alive for the past 2,000 years. Jan Hus (my predecessor by nearly 100 years) was executed in the year 1415 for the same convictions that "righteousness is by faith alone in Christ alone." Jan Hus' name (Hus) means goose, so his executors made fun of him by calling him "the goose." Just before Jan Hus was executed, he declared to his executors and to all who were watching, **"You may roast this goose now, but in a hundred years, there will come a Swan that you will not be able to silence."** And, that, by God's grace and good plan, was me. If you sometimes see a Swan on the pulpit in a Lutheran church, now you'll know why.

Today, it's your turn to keep the gospel alive, to share the good news with the people around you that *"the righteous shall live by faith"* in Jesus Christ alone, not by works, so that no one may boast. Our salvation is His work because of His love and all for His glory. Even the faith that saves us comes from Him! Best of all, we are no longer slaves to sin, but beloved children of the living God. Is there any better news than that? I think not!

ADDITIONAL INTERESTING INFORMATION

The Dream of Frederic the Wise

About that time, Frederic the Wise, Elector (def: members of the electoral college that elected the emperor of the Roman Empire) of Saxony, had a dream in which he saw a monk approach the church door at Wittenberg and write some words upon this door which glowed with such a brightness that it could be seen for hundreds of miles. The pen with which he wrote them stretched all the way from Wittenberg to Rome and had knocked the tiara of the Pope almost off, so that all of the princes of Europe rushed to hold it on his head. He awoke from that dream greatly disturbed and said to his attendant, *“Would that there were some Joseph or Daniel to interpret this dream for me!”* The morning upon which he awoke was October 31, 1517. That day, all alone, unknown to his friends, Martin Luther left his home and approached the church at Wittenberg carrying a piece of paper in his hand. There he nailed upon the church door Ninety-Five Theses which were a repudiation of the doctrine of indulgences. The hammer blow which affixed those Theses to that church door was a thunderclap which was to shake Europe to its very foundation, and the dream of the Elector came true that very day. – from Dr. D. James Kennedy’s sermon *“The Legacy of Luther”*

Martin & Katie

Luther didn't believe in long engagements. In fact, he had one of the shortest engagements in history — he proposed to Katherine and they were married that very same day (June 13, 1523).

She became Luther’s cherished Katie. She was a great mother, an excellent cook, and even brewed Luther’s beer!

Martin and Katie didn't marry each other because they were infatuated with each other; instead they grew to love each other because they were married. Martin and Katie viewed marriage as a school for growing in godliness.

Luther said, "I feel neither passionate love nor burning for my spouse, but I cherish her."

One Luther scholar explains how this was lived out in his life: ***"Luther's faith was simple enough to trust that after a conscientious day's labor, a Christian father could come home and eat his sausage, drink his beer, play his flute, sing with his children, and make love to his wife — all to the glory of God!"*** Excerpts are from

<http://www.boundless.org/relationships/2012/love-and-marriage-luther-style>.

What Ticked Luther Off – Indulgences!

Specifically, what set Luther off was the sale of indulgences. Indulgences were sort of the ultimate convergence of bad teaching and corrupt church leadership. Over the years Christians had come to believe that no one can enter heaven until he or she has been made perfectly holy. In other words, Jesus saves us—and every Christian will eventually get to heaven after he or she dies—but as long as there's any sin left in our lives, we won't be able to enter the presence of our holy God. This is where the doctrine of Purgatory became important, because it was supposedly in Purgatory that redeemed people would suffer until they had both ceased to sin and paid the temporal penalties for the sins they had committed. The Church also taught that a few people—the “saints”—had not only achieved perfect sanctification in this life, but had actually performed good works above and beyond the requirement to enter heaven. The leadership of the Church then claimed that all that excess of merit of the saints was stored up in a treasury and that they could dispense it as they saw fit. An indulgence was the giving out of a portion of this merit with the assurance that it would take so many days or years off your time in Purgatory. I think you can see how this undermines the Gospel.

At first the Church gave these indulgences out to people who had done some good work and who had shown remorse for their sins, but it didn't take long before the Church started giving out indulgences in return for cash contributions. This concerned Luther. He saw the people he was shepherding and knew that they genuinely wanted to follow Christ, but that the Church was leading them astray.

Take for example, Frederick the Wise. He was Luther's prince. He was simple and sincere in his Christian faith, but he was being led away from trusting in Jesus alone. The Church of the day had also developed superstitious ideas about the relics of saints and Frederick fell for this superstition hook, line, and sinker. **He had one of the largest collections in Europe. In fact, when it was catalogued in 1509 he had 5,005 different relics.** Each one came with an indulgence attached to it and all together those indulgences **promised him a 1,443 year reduction of his time in Purgatory.**

Here are just a few of the items in his collection: One tooth of St. Jerome, four pieces of St. Chrysostom, six of St. Bernard, and four of St. Augustine. Four of Mary's hairs, three pieces of her cloak, four from her girdle, and seven from the veil sprinkled with the blood of Christ. He also had one piece from Jesus' swaddling clothes, thirteen from his crib, a wisp of straw from the stable, one of the gold pieces brought by the wisemen and three pieces of their myrrh, one strand of hair from Jesus' beard, one of the nails from his crucifixion, a piece of bread from the last supper, and **even a twig from Moses' burning bush.** **Ten years after the catalogue was made Frederick's collection grew from 5,000 to over 19,000 relics and the Church leadership offered an indulgence of 1,902,202 years out of Purgatory to anyone who went to pay these relics homage and make the “suggested” cash contribution every All Saints' Day.**