

Reformation Sunday/October 27, 2013

Joel 2;23-32; Psalm 65; Luke 18:9-14

Rev. Joel M. Krueger

A Visit from Martin Luther

November 10, 1483 - February 18, 1546

(Martin Luther enters from the rear of the sanctuary. He is wearing a long black academic robe with fur collar. He is wearing a black Tudor flat cap. He holds in his hands a Bible and a copy of his 95 theses and a mallet. He walks to the front of the church, sets the Bible on the table, walks to the door at the other end of the sanctuary and hammers the papers to the door, moving then to the pulpit from which he preaches.)

Lasset uns beten:/Let us pray:/ der Wille des Gottes der Vater, Sohn und Heiliger Geist, durchgeführt werden. Amen./The will of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be done. Amen.

Guten Morgen, Friends!

I greet you in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Lord Sabaoth, the Lord of Hosts!

My name is Martin Luther.

I was born in the year 1483, on Nov. 10th (I will be 530 years old this year!).

My parents, Hans & Margaret Lindemann Luther, were peasant folk and very pious Christians and so because Nov. 11th, the day of my baptism, was the feast day of Saint Martin, they named me after him.

I was born in Eiselben, Saxony, in Germany. But the next year we moved to Mansfeld where my father became part owner in a copper mine which soon became quite prosperous.

So, because we came to have some wealth, my father was able to send me to good schooling and I received a good education.

My father saw that I was a very bright child, and so at age 14 I entered Latin school in Eisenach. There we had to sing for our supper - I had a wonderful tenor voice!

In 1501, when I was 17 I entered Erfurt University - the largest and most progressive university in all Germany.

By 1502 I had earned my Bachelor of Arts degree and by 1505 my Masters.

I then was appointed a teaching position at the university and I began to study Law, to the pleasure of my father.

Now, that same year (1505), I was on my way back to Erfurt, walking of course, after visiting with my parents, and a storm came up. It caught me out in the open and it was terrible! The lightning scared me so, I was frightened to death and when a bolt nearly hit me, I fell to the ground and screamed, "*Saint Anne, help me! I will become a monk!!!!*"

And so, I entered the Augustinian cloister in Erfurt to the displeasure of my father, and on April 3, 1507, I was ordained a Priest, within the Holy Roman Catholic Church.

The next year I was transferred to the new university in Wittenberg, a town known best for its Beer Brewery (which is not all bad).

And eventually, in 1512, I received my Doctorate there, and was placed on the faculty of the university.

I spent a lot of time studying scripture - the Holy Bible.

And I came to understand that the Word of God was not the Bible or even the words in the Bible. The Word of God, was the voice, the cry, the message from God that testified of Christ!

I would tell my students, to think of it this way, think of the Christmas scene, when you want to understand the Bible, "*Scripture is the swaddling clothes and the manger in which Christ lies.*"

So, there I was, an ordained Priest, Doctor, faculty member of the university, extremely intelligent and knowledgeable in the ways of the church and more and more of scripture, but my faith in God was weak. Well, not so much weak as hurtful! You see, I had long been bothered by "*Anfechtung*." - that is, "temptation." But more than temptation. I had feelings of being abandoned, forsaken, left by God. I was miserable!

I wanted to earn God's favor! I wanted to prove to God my goodness, to show God how much I was devoted, and that I was a pious and holy man. But I was never pious and holy enough! In my mind, I could never attain what God demanded of me.

I saw God as an angry, judgmental God who punishes sinners.

Then, one day, I had my "*Tower Discovery*." I was at the monastery, studying the scripture, looking at Psalms 31 and 71 and at Romans chapter 1 where it speaks of God's righteousness. I later would write these words:

"Then I began to comprehend "the righteousness of God" through which the righteous are saved by God's grace, namely through faith; that the "righteousness of God" which is revealed through the Gospel was to be understood in a passive sense in which God through mercy justified man by faith, as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."

*Now I felt exactly as if I had been born again,
and I believed that I had entered paradise through widely open doors."*

See, what I came to understand, was that we cannot, through good works, save ourselves before God. Only by God's Good Grace, through faith, can we find salvation. Not by anything we do, but only through believing, having faith in the Grace of God. *Solo fide*. By Grace alone.

So, when Pope Leo in Rome, sent out preaching monks, to sell "*Indulgences*" to the people, oh, and there was one who especially bothered me to no end, a ranter named Johann Tetzel, well, I could not stand aside but thrust myself into the battle! You see, what these *indulgences* are, is a payment to obtain God's Grace! One, it was said by the Church, could give money, to cover for sins, or take away time in purgatory. Now, even worse, these monks were telling the lie that such payment could be made on behalf of loved ones long departed!

The saying was often used at that time:

"As soon as the coin in the coffer rings/The soul from purgatory springs!"

What horse manure! What vile filth this teaching! And even worse, this fleecing of the people, both rich and poor, was so that the Pope could build himself a cathedral in Rome, St. Peter's!

I had to do something! I still affirmed the Pope's authority but I had to stop such terrible teaching. And so I wrote my *95 Theses* arguing against these *Indulgences*.

It was October 31st, 1517 and I nailed them to the front door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, where all who came to the *All Saints Day* services, on November 1st would see them.

And that was what they say, the beginning of the Protestant Reformation! Though the protests and movements of reform had been going on for years and years before this.

But from that time on, there would be many meetings and many things written and discussed, not only by me but by many others who wanted Reform within the church. Some who were my friends like Philip Melancthon and Martin Bucer, as well as some I disagreed with on many topics like Ulrich Zwingli in Switzerland and later on, after me, by those like John Calvin whom you good Congregationalists must know, John Knox known to Presbyterians and John Wesley from England, known to Methodists, and many others.

One of those meetings was called the *Diet of Worms* held for many months in 1521. There I had to defend my writings and teachings, that they were calling heretical! Johann Eck, representing

the Holy Roman Empire, laid copies of my teachings before me and asked if these were mine and if I stood by them. I was to answer if I recanted of my writings. I replied:

"Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason (for I do not trust either in the pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. Here I stand. I can do no other. May God help me. Amen."

The Reformation brought great change and great upheaval all throughout Europe. People were killed, burned at the stake, for stating what they believed. Nations and even different groups within nations, went to war over this!

I was even excommunicated and had a death sentence placed upon my head! The Pope called me that "*Wild Boar!*" Said that I was destroying the vineyard, the garden, that was the Church.

But we didn't want to destroy the Church, we wanted to call the Church back to its original teachings, to the teachings of Christ and to Scripture. *Solo scriptura*. Scripture alone.

Many changes occurred and many people struggled with so many changes.

We made changes in the way we understood the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion.

We made changes in the way we thought about Baptism.

We changed the way we worshiped, moving from the Latin Mass to reading scripture in our own language.

I, in fact even translated the Bible into German so the people could actually read the scriptures!

We taught what scripture says about the Priesthood of all Believers, that all are equal before God and that none should be placed above another.

We changed the music of the church. We went from having only monks singing Latin chants to having everyone sing, in their own language, songs that they learned and came to know and love. I even wrote some myself!

We also taught that clergy should marry. Though I always believed marriage was a wonderful and honorable state, I had remained a bachelor myself. At one point, when 12 nuns escaped from a local convent, it was my duty to find husbands for them. I was successful with all but one, Katharina Van Bora. She would marry no one, but me! So, at age 41, I married this young 26 year old, on June 13, 1525. We had a good and happy marriage, had 6 children, and our house was always a busy, hustle-bustle kind of place. She was more precious to me than the kingdom of France or the riches of Venice! I loved my "Lord Katie", as I called her, my "rib." My life would end 18 February, 1546, at 3:00 pm in the afternoon. Age 62.

So, through the Reformation came the Protestant Church.

And I must remind you of one most important thing.

The Church must always be in the process of Reform!

You live in a time like I did, when the Church is being called to change, to reform itself, to seek once again the truth of God, and to make it relevant to the people.

It may become a time of upheaval, a time of turmoil and anguish for some, for change is not often easy. Yet it may also be a time of excitement, of opportunity and discovery in knowing more closely the will of God for us and for all creation.

May your faith and your acts and your prayers be such that they unite and not divide this world. It has seen too much division already.

And may God bless you with courage and wisdom and hope and in all things, love.

Let us pray,

O Father and God of all comfort,

*through your word and Holy Spirit
grant us a firm, glad and grateful faith.
By it may we easily overcome all trials
and at length realize that what your dear Son,
Jesus Christ himself says is true:
“But take courage, I have conquered the world.” Amen.*