

Luther MTC April

His life

1. Turned world upside down – what happened with Luther changed the face of Europe forever (cf. Acts 17: disciples in Thessalonica start a riot and dragged before magistrates and accused of turning the world upside down) – when you start a revival you've got to be prepared for everything being turned upside down and things getting violent (cf. Festo Kivengere, Brother Andrew, Athanasius) – not a quiet life.
2. Who was Luther? Born (1483) into a working class, rural, peasant family – always proud of that – nothing refined about Martin Luther – he tells you what he thinks – sometimes very crudely – what you see is what you get – completely down to earth – works hard, talks hard, laughs hard. Father was copper miner – had ambitions for his son – wants him to be the first one of their family to go to university and study law – he is the one who will enter the middle class – make it.
Coming home on vacation – in thunder storm – bolt crashes near him – throws him on his face – screams out “St Ann save me and I will become a monk” – St Anne patron saint of miners – Luther survives – 10 days later presents himself at Augustinian monastery. Break down in relationship with father – massive impact on Luther – wants to please his father – some argue that Luther projects that on God – sees God as an unhappy father – may be some truth in that – also driven by being so close to death – how can I stand before God? Becomes a priest (1509) – celebrates first mass – as he ‘makes God present’ he is overwhelmed by a sense of unworthiness made worse by the fact his father is there.

Theological battles

3. What are the indulgences all about? Saints have a fast track to Heaven – everyone else goes through purgatory (serious time – 1000yrs). Saints have excess good works → treasury of merit looked after by church (bank managers). Indulgence system = faithful give to the church and the church declares that merit has been applied to the departed in purgatory and they have had so many years knocked off.
Church is building St Peter's in Rome – amazing building – not cheap – massively overstretched themselves financially – so church needs money. At same time Archbishop Albert de Mainz (in Germany) wants another bishopric – buys one from the church – he can't really afford it – on credit – and he negotiates with the church that the security for his loan is that he will sell a new indulgence for the church.
That's what the 95 theses are about (Oct 31 1517). NB. 2 things:
 - a. 95 is a lot of theses – could I come up with 95 reasons for anything? – are we willing to do serious reading and thinking and writing?
 - b. Comes out of pastoral concern – not an abstract debate – Luther is a pastor and he is concerned about his flock being led astray
Cf. with his barber – once his barber said he had trouble praying – Luther went home and wrote him a 12 page treatise on prayer – loads of practical stuff like if you don't feel like praying don't just sit there, go to church and pray with others, read the psalms – i.e. he's a pastor.
4. When he writes the 95 theses he hasn't got all his doctrine worked out. He's still not quite dealt with this problem of unworthiness before God.
This is how medieval Catholicism worked.
 - ⊙ Do your best → infusion of grace → good works → counted as righteousness
 - ⊙ Sin → confess → penitence → forgivenLuther's problem was – (1) how do I know I've done my best? (2) I keep sinning - Luther leaves confession box then remember loads of other stuff he hasn't confessed.

Tormented – feels the wrath of God against him, he fasts, he prays, pilgrimages, later said “**If ever a monk would get to heaven by his monkery it was I**” – he totally did the religious thing – but no peace.

The great turning point comes as he’s reading Romans – Rom. 1:17 – He had always read ‘righteousness of God’ as an attribute of God – as a threatening thing – then he suddenly saw that this was something *given* – from God – an alien righteousness. He saw it again in Romans 3, Philippians 3, saw it everywhere – we are clothed with the righteousness of Christ. So he says I am “**at the same time righteous and a sinner.**”

- Who do we normally talk about as sinners?
- Who do we normally mean when we say someone is righteous?

Luther realised – as a saved person I am legally declared righteous though I remain a sinner in my being. The Holy Spirit begins to work on me but my righteousness is always an alien thing – in heaven – my righteousness is Christ. Even though the Spirit will begin to work good through me – even that good will be polluted by my sin and need atoning for – what gets me into the presence of God is only ever 100% the righteousness of Christ. Luther got a lot of stuff wrong, intemperate, anti-Semitic – he was not righteous. *But that was his point:* “**Let us equip ourselves against the accusations of Satan with this and similar passages of Holy Scripture. If he says, “Thou shalt be damned,” you tell him: “No, for I fly to Christ who gave Himself for my sins. In accusing me of being a damnable sinner, you are cutting your own throat, Satan. You are reminding me of God’s fatherly goodness toward me, that He so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. In calling me a sinner, Satan, you really comfort me above measure.” With such heavenly cunning we are to meet the devil’s craft and put from us the memory of sin.**”

“By faith in Christ a person may gain such sure and sound comfort, that he need not fear the devil, sin, death, or any evil. “Sir Devil,” he may say, “I am not afraid of you. I have a Friend whose name is Jesus Christ, in whom I believe. He has abolished the Law, condemned sin, vanquished death, and destroyed hell for me. He is bigger than you, Satan. He has licked you, and holds you down. You cannot hurt me.” This is the faith that overcomes the devil.”¹

5. Catholic teaching did not like this idea of assurance. Thought it would lead to licence. They insisted the programme should be:

Sin → confess → penitence → forgiven

Luther saw that this **didn’t take sin seriously or grace seriously enough** – sins are not singular things an otherwise good person does, and grace is not just ‘a bit of a clean-up’ – we are dead and we need new life – Luther started studying and lecturing on baptism and made his great rediscovery...

6. **Unity with Christ** – Rom 5: grace; then Rom. 6: shall we sin? – No – Why? – *union with Christ* – died and risen – united with him. Catholic teaching – you need to keep coming back to the sacraments, the sacrifice of the mass to be forgiven; Luther - No – we are united with him.
7. Song of Songs 2:16 was the centre of Luther’s gospel – We have his righteousness, he has our sin, at marriage there is a change of identity declared but bride is still the same, not necessarily about our feelings but a change of status – one flesh. “**Brother, you would like to feel God’s favour as you feel your sin. But you are asking too much. Your righteousness rests on something much better than feelings. Wait and hope until it will be revealed to you in the Lord’s own time. Don’t go by your feelings, but go by the doctrine of faith, which pledges Christ to you.**”²

¹ These are quotes from Luther’s brilliant [Commentary on Galatians](#).

² On Galatians 5:5 *ibid*.

Some more things we can learn from Luther:

8. Standing for the Truth, standing on the Word of God – conscience captive to the word of God
9. No sacred/secular – marriage, work and the home all sacred; the pastor does not ‘go into ministry’ – priesthood of all believers – pastor not first class Christian
10. The Word does the work – that’s what turned world upside down – Luther: “I just preached the Word and then went and drank beer with Philip and the word did the work” – his conviction was that the Word is what changes lives and churches, not oratory or atmospheric music or force – The Word.
11. Theology of the cross/weakness/foolishness v. Theology of glory/power. Is that what we are prepared to preach and glory in and be shaped into ourselves? (cf. 1 Cor. 1:18-25)