

Kirby Lawrence Hill  
October 29, 2017  
Habakkuk 2:1-4  
Romans 3:19-26

Abington Presbyterian Church  
Reformation Sunday

### SOMEONE WHO NAILED IT

(After the second scripture passage, ML comes into the chancel and begins conferring with Rev. Diane, then moves to the lectern for the ‘conversation’)

K: Sir, may I help you?

ML: I would hope to be of help to you. A few minutes ago I heard the congregation singing a hymn I wrote. I hope you found it enriching.

K: I don’t understand. Are you talking about “A Mighty Fortress is our God”? That was written by Martin Luther close to 500 years ago.

ML: Ja. I wrote the words and the music for it at a time when the plague was sweeping through Europe and there was plenty of religious and political upheaval. Next to the Word of God, the noble art of music is the greatest treasure in the world. Yet, I’m not sure in your mild times today that you can catch how important it was to us to affirm that God is Ein feste Berg, God is a mighty fortress for us.

K: Wait. You’re Martin Luther?! We’re just two days away from the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of when you began the Protestant Reformation.

ML: Ja, it seems like it was only a couple of hundred years ago. I really wasn’t trying to start a major new movement in the church – I was just hoping to bring reform to the Roman Church, of which I was a part as an Augustinian monk.

K: How was it that you became a monk?

ML: I had been studying law. That’s what my father wanted me to pursue. But one day when I was out walking, the most ferocious thunderstorm broke out. I was almost struck by lightning. Out of that experience, I dedicated my life to

-serving God the best that I could and I began my life of worship, prayer, and studying scripture.

K: And it was out of your studies that you decided to spark some theological discussions?

ML: The social media of the day was posting discussion points by nailing them on the church door where everyone could read them. I had 95 Theses or statements of my hopes and dreams expressing how I thought the church should go about being the church. I always have been rather lengthy in my writings. I set a goal for myself to keep it under a hundred and I was successful. Need me to nail anything up on your church door?

K: No, thank you. We recently posted our own hopes and dreams on little ribbons and hung them on the stone wall in front of the church. There were 107 of them. But you were also successful in raising quite a commotion.

ML: The Roman Church was raising funds to renovate St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome and some misguided soul offered people indulgences, which purported to promise that a large monetary gift would mean guaranteed access to heaven. Ironically, I had been studying St. Paul's epistle to the church in Rome where it spoke of us being saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, not by financial gifts we offered, as if someone could actually buy their way into heaven. The next time you are raising funds for the church, be careful how you go about it.

K: We're involved in our stewardship campaign right now, but we will be cautious about what we promise! So the church leaders did not respond as you had hoped?

ML: No, my goal had been to bring about needed change from within the church. You may find it hard to imagine church leaders who were resistant to change, but they were.

K: Yes, hard to imagine!

ML: I had to be true to the word of God, so I couldn't just be an uncritical lover of the church. Neither could I be an unloving critic. I sought to be a loving critic

who made his protests known. When they called upon me to recant what I had written, I looked at scripture and what I believed the church was called to be. I know I am responsible for what I say, but also for what I do not say. I had to say to them, 'Here I stand. I can do no other.'

K: That led to you being kicked out of the church, right? But that then freed you up to lead others who were protesting, becoming a whole protestant movement. Among your early efforts as I recall was working on a translation of the bible into German so Christians could read it for themselves.

ML: Ja, I worked on the New Testament first and eventually finished the Old Testament as well. God's timing was impeccable. Printing presses had just been developed, so the broad spreading of the scriptures in people's spoken language was a wonderful gift of God.

K: You wrote and taught and preached everywhere you went. And Lutheran churches began to pop up throughout what was called the Holy Roman Empire at that time.

ML: I never wanted them to be called Lutheran. The head of the church is Jesus Christ – not Martin Luther or even a pope. The demands on my time were so great that I felt I needed to spend three hours in prayer every morning in order to have what I needed to accomplish each day.

K: Then as a former monk, no longer under your vows, you felt free to marry?

ML: One of my best decisions was to marry a former nun, Katharina von Bora, with whom I was blessed to have six children. There is no more lovely, friendly and charming relationship, communion or company than a good marriage.

K: You set a model for the practice of clerical marriage which opened the way for Protestant clergy to marry. Thank you!

ML: Bitte!

K: No, I'm not bitter about it at all!

ML: Excuse me. ‘Bitte’ in German means ‘you’re welcome.’

K: Thank you for that clarification. We are Presbyterians who trace our roots back to John Calvin. Did you ever meet him?

ML: Regrettably, no. My associate, Philip Melancthon met with Jean Calvin several times, but I never got to. I read his Institutes of the Christian Religion. He was almost as wordy as I have been. He was a brilliant man, very dedicated to scripture. He got a few things wrong, but some would say that I did too.

K: It has now been 500 years since you opened the door to a protestant identity. I wonder if you would tell us what you think being a protestant might mean in today’s world.

ML: There are some who think being a protestant is to be anti-Catholic. That’s ridiculous! Yes, I disagreed strongly with some Catholic practices that I thought were inconsistent with scripture. But I pray for all parts of the church of Jesus Christ that each part would bring its unique strength into service of our one Lord and Savior. All of us need to figure out what our hearts cling to and rely on, because that is what really is our God. So the first step is to submit to the one true God. Then through the study of scripture, we will discover that the Bible is alive – it speaks to us. It has feet and runs after us. It has hands that lay hold of us. I’m not sure where you will be led, but you can know the One who is our Guide. As you apply the truths of the gospel to your own context, you will face challenges greater than you, but the One who is greater than you and me both will be an abiding presence. Going forward, I offer one more piece of guidance.

K: Please.

ML: Whatever I have held in my hands, I have eventually lost. But whatever I have placed in God’s hands, that I still possess. I must be on my way. Continue to be formed and reformed by the Spirit of God and may you always be fully aware of the mightiest of fortresses that stands on your behalf.

K: Thank you for being with us, servant of God, Martin.

A number of Martin Luther quotes from a number of sources are incorporated throughout this dialogue. Thanks goes to Blaine Cloud for his portrayal of the great reformer.