

## Diet of Worms: 500 Anniversary

Have you ever got caught up in something that was way bigger than you ever imagined? The college kid that's good at computers has a few laughs and hacks into the student ID database and cancels some kids' lunch cards. Fairly harmless, ya? Except the student accounts had social security numbers in them, and now those have been breached. And so there's an investigation. And suddenly its in the news. And suddenly he's scrubbing his computer to try and hide his tracks. But he gets found, and suddenly he is expelled, and he's on a federal database. That story is, roughly, based on a true story, from someone at my undergrad college. A seemingly harmless prank suddenly turns into something overwhelmingly bigger.

500 years ago there was a man named Martin Luther. He had a few titles: monk, priest, theologian. But those were hardly blips on the radar just like they are today, no one cares. Sure a handful of us get mad or happy because of the local pastor, but not too many in high places give us much thought. "Just say nice things on Sundays, will ya?" This particular Monk just wants a theological debate, that's all. So he posts his 95 theses to see if anyone will take him up on in it. And we know how that story goes, ya?

They are taken and put in the printing press and reproduced and sent all over. And the people fall in love with them because they push back against the powers-that-

be and the system of paying a guy a thousand miles away so that you can go to heaven. Luther was quite popular with the common folk.

So Luther finds himself the face of something big, a movement pushing back against theological tyranny. I can't imagine what the weight of that felt like. But that's only the beginning.

Soon this monk shows up on the radar of Rome. Rome is used to dealing with "heretics" so they send for, not just a bishop, but a Cardinal. Cardinal Cajetan comes to talk some sense into him, make him stop. This is no little thing. It's the District President of The Northwest District flying out to talk to me. It's being called into the Regional Director's Office.

Luther when he meets with Cajetan, thinks he is getting a debate, but no. He was getting a chance to recant, nothing more. He refuses, which frustrates Cajetan and so his case gets sent back to Rome, they label him a heretic, and excommunicate him from the Church.

So Luther's little writings have lost him his job as a monk and priest. And got him kicked out of the Church, which is no small thing when it's been your whole life for years now. And the Church and state weren't so separate as they are now, so it did carry some social, legal, and political ramifications. I wonder if Luther had any idea when he posted his theses that it would change his life this much.

But it's going to get bigger.

Though excommunicated, Luther is still teaching in Wittenberg, because Frederick, his German prince likes him. And I am convinced He likes him not just because Luther puts Wittenberg on the map and brings in all sorts of revenue, but also because he believes his teaching.

And while all of this is happening, the Holy Roman Empire has got a new Emperor. Charles V, is new, slight of stature, fighting Islam in the east and desperately needs the German knights.

And so the Emperor in January of 1521 comes to Worms, Germany, for a Diet or counsel. And to win the respect of the German princes. There are days of negotiations and, believe it or not, the emperor must help them with a particular problem they have: how to avoid an uprising by their people who support this little monk named Luther. Now, some of the princes believed Luther, some didn't, but their people sure did. And if the princes were going to go off to fight the Emperor's war, they couldn't have a civil war raging in Germany. So amazingly enough, on April 18<sup>th</sup>, today, in 1521, exactly 500 years ago, a defrocked monk is called to stand before the Holy Roman Emperor, arguably the most powerful man in the world.

Forget a subpoena to small claims court, forget being called out by a regional manager, or a senator, forget making national headlines, this is huge. Wars, nations, lives, hang in the balance. And people say theology doesn't matter!

So I think it's worth noting that there is a bit of pressure on Luther here. And so will this monk, who "talks the talk" from a thousand miles away, say it to the Emperor's face? Or will he wilt under the pressure? We know the story, so there he stands he does not recant. And the world, literally, is changed.

So with all the pomp and circumstance out of the way, we can now get to the point of this sermon. What makes a man or woman stand in front of overwhelming odds, rulers, and authorities, and defy them? Luther is not the first. This Easter season we see disciples go from cowards to men who will stand before rulers and authorities and defy them. Paul is eager to go to Caesar, the most powerful man in the world, and speak the Gospel of the risen King. But therein, I believe, lies the reason.

All who defy the authorities do so because they acknowledge a higher authority.

This works in all aspects of life, I'm pretty sure. The two year old defies the parent when they know they won't back up their threats of timeout. So they yield to a higher authority, their desire to not clean up or whatever. The criminal risks the wrath of the authorities because the reward, money, drugs, or whatever, is worth it. It's the higher authority to them.

But more to the point today: The disciples stand before the earthly rulers, Luther stands before the Holy Roman Emperor and they defy them, and defy death which is the tool of the rulers, because they acknowledge a greater King, a greater authority, in the One that undoes death.

So the rulers and authorities of this world wax and wane. It's Pilate one day, it's Caesar the next, it's Charles V another, Constantine another. God gives authority to one, then another, and make no mistake we are called to submit to them when they don't cause us to sin.

But only one King has authority over all things. Only One King speaks and the sick, the dead, the wind, and the waves listen. Only One has authority over the grave. Shown as he rises again, not as a spirit, but flesh and blood. Only One can cancel out the earthly authorities' sword. You have a corrupt ruler who sentences you to death? Fear not, the Lord will void that paperwork out and make sure you receive life instead. He voided the cries of death by crucifixion laid on his Son and raised him up. And that same Son is ascended and speaks on His people's behalf saying that they are forgiven and heirs of life. And no matter what the depression, or cancer, or the car accident, or the king says, the King of king's verdict stands true.

May we acknowledge a greater authority in our Risen King. And may we celebrate that our King is merciful and good. He has promised forgiveness, restoration, and refreshing in our Acts reading. He has made us his children, as we see in our 1 John reading. How does that feel? To be a child of the most powerful man in the universe? And, in our Gospel reading he sends the eyewitnesses of his authority out into the world that we might hear of his power and love. And they found themselves in situations that, seemingly, were a bit over their heads, a bit out of their paygrade, but they stood fast. Because they knew they were a part of something much bigger, The King of kings' plan of salvation. And you are a part of that plan too, he has grafted you in in baptism and faith, so rejoice, the Risen King is with us and, as Paul says, if God is for us who can be against us? Today we remember the Roman Emperor can't be, and in Jesus we see sin, death, and hell can't either. God be praised.