

Drama for October 28, 2012 Reformation Sunday

Characters: Dr. Martin Luther
Dr. Philip Melanchthon, friend of Martin
Sarah, a maid
Narrator

Setting: Wartburg Castle, Germany, July 1521

Set: Table with Martin sitting in the center. Sarah and Philip sit on his right and left.

Narrator: On October 31, 1517 Professor Martin Luther circulated 95 Theses for debate among religious scholars. These theses questioned the marketing practices of a man named Johann Tetzel who was traveling throughout Germany selling indulgences. Many Christians believed that after a person died he or she went to purgatory as a time to cleanse themselves from their earthly sins before they were released to heaven. Tetzel taught that an indulgence bought by a living relative could free a dead person from purgatory and send him or her straight to heaven. Luther was not alone in criticizing Tetzel. Many religious leaders and common citizens were opposed to him. Tetzel was used to some heckling and booing wherever he went. For some reason, however, Luther's writings and preaching against Tetzel were more effective than others. The 95 Theses were translated from Latin into German. Then they were published and distributed widely. Tetzel's sales of indulgences began to be seriously affected.

The whole thing would have blown over with a whimper, except that Tetzel had powerful friends. Conflict stirred higher and higher. Many attempts were made to end the conflict. Tetzel and Luther even met in private to try to constructively reach an agreement. All these attempts failed. A storm was growing that threatened to destroy the church and the political stability of Europe.

On April 17th 1521 at 4:00 PM Luther appeared on trial before Charles the Fifth. Charles was from Spain and he was the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. Luther was asked to take back what he said in his many writings. Luther politely refused. For three days the political leaders of Germany tried to negotiate with Luther and avert a crisis. But Luther became ever more vehement that he would not negotiate. It became apparent that Luther was going to be condemned. Charles the Fifth had made a promise to Luther – he would be allowed 21 days to safely return to his home. In exchange Luther had to promise not to preach or write anything during that time. Charles held to his promise, and so did Luther – almost.

Unknown to Luther, a plan had been made to kidnap him while he was on his way home. The night of May 3rd 1521 Luther and two friends were traveling by wagon through a forest. Suddenly four or five armed horsemen plunged out of the forest and demanded Luther. The armed men snatched him from the wagon and drug him half stumbling, half running around a bend in the road. Once out of sight they released Luther, put him on horseback, and escorted him to Wartburg Castle, the gigantic fortress of Frederick the Wise, Luther's long-time political supporter; except that not even Frederick knew Luther was there!

Luther was hidden in Wartburg Castle for nearly a year. He was rarely allowed out. When he did go out he was disguised and told to pretend to be Sir George, a young knight. Luther didn't like his captivity. While the ten months in hiding turned out to be the most productive in his life, he was also deeply depressed and often very sick.

We meet Luther in his secret room in the castle visiting with his friend and fellow university professor, Dr. Philip Melanchthon, and a maid, Sarah.

Martin: Why do I have to stay up here!?! What's the point of all this hiding?

Philip: We've been over this every time I visit you, Martin. You have to hide. The emperor has labeled you an "Outlaw".

Sarah: Yes, *anyone* out there is allowed to kill you whenever they want - and not be punished for it.

Martin: So what? What good am I to anyone? All I do is *hide*, and *think*, and *worry*, and eat this horrible food.

Sarah: The food isn't horrible! Every peasant out there would love to get a taste of the food we cook.

Martin: That's just the point. I'm a monk. I eat common food. I'm used to plain food with no flavor and no fat. This food of royalty is too rich. I always have a stomachache from it.

Sarah: Yes, and there's medicine coming from Wittenberg to cure that. Just rest a bit and enjoy life.

Martin: Eating... drinking... resting... doing nothing. This isn't for me. I feel pointless. I want to get out and do something.

Philip: Just be patient, even if it takes a long time. Who knows what's coming Martin.

Martin: That's just it. What is coming? Am I to hide here for the rest of my life? Is that what God made me for? To hide in a castle? Sure, I can read books and I can write things - which you can smuggle out for me, but this is a coward's life. People will think I'm too scared to stand up for what is right.

Sarah: What is right is for you to keep hiding. Like Philip says, who knows what's coming? Maybe things will die down. Maybe Frederick and the Emperor and the Pope can work out a deal.

Philip: Maybe God will change the hearts of people. Right now you just need to wait.

Martin: Wait, wait, wait! I never knew it would come to this. I only followed my conscious. Even before Tetzel showed up Prince Frederick had told him not to come, but he came anyway. Lots of people protested. I did too. When he left I quit my protest and moved on. You know well that I dropped the subject of indulgences. I taught classes on Galatians and Hebrews and I never once mentioned Tetzel or indulgences or the pope.

Philip: But the people have been restless for a long time. You became their hero.

Martin: I don't want to be their hero. Let them speak for themselves. I just want to teach.

Sarah: God has gifted you for many things.

Martin: (*sarcastically*) Some giftedness! Do you know I hear my parents are ashamed of me? I embarrassed them when I left law school to become a monk. I embarrassed them again when I became a priest and spilled the wine the first time I led Communion. Now I cause trouble and then run off and hide. What does my father say when people ask him about me, "My son Martin the coward? I don't know where he's gone. He got into trouble and then ran away and hid."

Sarah: You yourself said that God's ways are not always clear to understand. You say that the cross comes to us. Now the cross has come to you. Are you going to accept it or reject it?

Martin: Now's a fine time to discover that you pay attention to my preaching!

Philip: She's right you know. You are gifted. I'm every bit the scholar you are Martin, but I'm not the speaker you are. People respond to you. They want to hear you. They know you speak the truth.

Martin: Then let me out of here! This is not for me. If I go out, and if I am to survive, then God will protect me. If I am to die, then I'd rather die at the hands of my enemies. I want to go back to teaching at Wittenberg.

Sarah: You are too impatient. Let God work in God's own time.

Martin: That doesn't help right now. I don't get any of this. Why hide? Why wait? What is God's purpose in this? What does God let the faith be corrupted by those in power? Why do the poor suffer at the hands of politicians who use the grace of God to oppress them? Sin has a strong foothold in our world. We Germans are blind to it. We are childish. We are fools!

Philip: Fools we may be, but you are hardly doing nothing. You've only been here two months and already you've written three books: *The Commentary on the Magnificat*, *On Confession: Whether the Pope Has the Authority to Require It*, and your book *Against Latomus*. People are using your writings all over Germany. They need you to stay alive and keep working. You always wanted to translate the Bible into the common language the German people speak. Start working on it.

Martin: Fine, fine. I have most of what I need. But staying cooped up in this room is too much. I want to go outside. I want to not just look at the sun out the window, but go outside and feel it on my body.

Sarah: Just a little more patience, Martin. Once your beard grows in more fully and once your hair grows longer you'll be able to go out and no one will notice you.

Martin: I know, I'm to be "Sir George" and travel with the knights. It's a sweet idea, but I don't like the company of knights. Their ways are too rough for me. They drink too much, fight too much, and take advantage of women too much. I am a monk, not a soldier. I fight with words, not swords.

Sarah: But you will be able to go outside a bit.

Martin: But really, what is the point of going outside if I have to be disguised? You say that when I am allowed out I'm not allowed to show any interest in books. That could give away my disguise. Then why bother? Go outside with people I don't like to be an imposter and do what I don't want to!?! That's not life. God did not create me to be a liar.

Philip: No one is calling you a liar.

Martin: I am the one calling me a liar! I am every bit the coward that I call others who live in fear. I am to slink around in the shadows pretending to be someone else.

Philip: Let's just stay safe for now. In time we'll see.

Sarah: You always say, "God alone will do the work." So let God do the work here too.

Martin: My own words used against me once again! I know I must stay. I know I must be patient. I know I must trust. But all too often life does not get better. I do not want to live like this. I hope God brings real improvement, and not just for me; for every person.

Philip: Continue to care for the people Martin. That is what you are best at. Continue to care for the people and let God do the rest.

Narrator: Luther wrote twelve books while in hiding. Most of them were for common people to help them understand God's love for them. Luther's greatest writing at Wartburg was a translation of the New Testament from Greek into German. Luther's was not the first translation into Greek, but it was the first one to use ordinary language that common people could understand. Later Luther also translated the Old Testament from Hebrew into German. He was always committed to bringing the Word of God to every person.

On March 6, 1522 Luther left Wartburg Castle and returned to his home in Wittenberg. This was not safe. He was still considered to be an outlaw. But mobs and riots were breaking out in Wittenberg. Luther's teachings were causing chaos. At the urging of Wittenberg's leaders Luther returned. His return managed to quell the violence, but Luther saw what great instability lay on the horizon. Bigger trouble was brewing. There was no turning it all back.