



Uniting Church in Australia

National Conference of Lay Preachers

Reformation 500

7th July, 2017

Gordon and Dennis

31st October, 2017 is the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther's protest in Wittenberg

Gordon – Lutheran Pastor

Until not all that long ago, Lutherans in particular like to get stuck into Catholics – a lot of their identity was tied up in not being Catholic.

But Luther did not originally aim to set up a new church – but it happened anyway (not least because of the Catholic Church response to his complaints). However, people always need to beware of living off the mythology of, in this case, Luther (but also Wesley, Knox, ... [Whitlam, Menzies]): we need to learn from all parts of the “system”.

Martin Luther was a visionary reformer ??

Martin Luther was a renegade and prophet ??

Note that:

1 He was not a “lone ranger” suddenly appearing out of nowhere – there was a community / network of people. It's just that Luther was the most forthright; and incredibly productive over a period of 3-4 years.

2 His theological and ecclesiological work led to a new kind of church structure – which he had to organise himself.

3 He made a lot of enemies – perhaps unnecessarily. But grace was so central for him that he refused absolutely to compromise on the notion. Not everybody wanted to go in so hard on the matter.

Some key statements

- Human failing(s) led to God's response in grace; so if we were perfect, perhaps God would not do that [would not need to].
- Luther opposed the identification of religion with morality – it was a revolutionary innovation to separate the two. And met huge resistance. He declared that religion demanded a response of the heart, not mere action.
- The democratisation of the Christian faith (no need for priests any more) we take for granted, but it too was revolutionary. The other side of the “priesthood of all believers” of course is that we all (are to) take responsibility for our faith [and not claim “that's what they taught me].
- ***Grace is a gift freely given – we live in response, not because of anything else. In human life, people think they don't experience forgiveness; in fact what they don't experience is **grace**. It's the reverse side of **shame**.***

Grace IS NOT God forgiving because of our human failing. Grace IS a source of wholeness. In Acts ch 8 – Philip and the Ethiopian – the story is really about Philip and the expanding, ecumenistic church. “I am the God who makes all things new.”

Always it is God's initiative, God who comes close to us (we don't get anywhere hear God) especially in Holy Communion and the stranger. And in the everyday.

God is also hidden in the suffering – if we're told that God is unlikely to be found in a particular situation, then it's like that precisely where God is.

Dennis – Very Rev RC; Episcopal Vicar [= assistant to the Archbishop]

Luther was a giant – things changed when he came on the scene – and we still deal with the consequences. Catholics will be joining in the commemoration of the Reformation (but not celebrating it) – and it is helping the Catholic community deal with the sadness of a broken community.

But this anniversary, which just happens to be the 500th, is unlike all other significant ones because it is happening in a whole new social and ecclesial context. It's the first ecumenical commemoration – and it has to be that way.

Pope Francis has observed that the spiritual experience of Martin Luther challenges us to remember that apart from God, we can do nothing.

Including take any initiative of reconciliation.

So how are we to translate the experience of Luther into language that makes sense in our time and place? *Where can I find a gracious God?*

Hopefully it will be an opportunity to *learn from* each other.

- Both the Catholic and Lutheran churches face global challenges. The Catholic Church is literally catholic, but many places and people have forgotten their Christian heritage, including knowledge of these long-ago disputes. Religious pluralism is the present context. The old ways, including those of commemorating the Reformation, do not work any more.
- AKA – we do our history better and more honestly these days.
- There is now 50 years of Catholic/Lutheran ecumenism behind us. The Joint Declaration on Justification lays out the richness that each has to offer to the other.

But for today – what does it mean to believe in a merciful God? How can we find it?
It's all about Jesus.

Comments relayed from Rev D'Arcy Wood (absent unwell)

* The World Methodist Conference has affirmed the Joint Declaration.

John Wesley thought that Luther's teaching was fine – except for the absence of sanctification.
What is the UC doing?

- The Basis of Union para 10: the church learns from all the Reformation witnesses.
- The UCA describes itself as Catholic Reformed Evangelical.
- The UCA is a member of the World Communion of Reformed Churches.

A "Wittenberg Witness" was signed on 5th July, 2017.

Anglicans have also been active in the field.