

That's not Martin Luther - he isn't black!

2 Samuel 11²⁶⁻¹²^{10,13-15}; Psalm 32; Galatians 2^{15-end}; Luke 7³⁷⁻⁸

It is no longer I that lives, but Christ that lives in me. [Galatians 2²⁰]

In a year 8 lesson (age 12-13) exploring the Reformation in Europe a class was shown a picture of the Monk, Martin Luther, who was the public face of the revolution in faith. One lad stuck his hand in the air and confidently corrected the teacher: "That's not Martin Luther - he isn't black!" Indeed, it *wasn't* Martin Luther King Jnr, but it *was* the married, beer-loving, little fat monk who challenged the Pope and changed the world!

While both Martin Luther and Martin Luther King Jnr had important things to say, it is important that we don't confuse any message of personal freedom or liberty with the message that remains at the heart of the Gospel - we are justified through faith alone!

We will never have to go through what King David went through! David had to earn his forgiveness - and it was costly - but because we are *In Christ* we need a faith that reaches out to God; an honesty about our own lives; and a willingness to receive the gift of being declared innocent.

One supposes that King David assumed that his actions as Monarch were above reproach or question. However, God had other ideas and into the royal court blunders Nathan.

- ✦ The background is one of the best known stories in the Bible. Bathsheba is having a bath on her roof and is seen by David. David invites her over for 'afternoon tea' and as a result she becomes pregnant. David gets her husband back from the battlefield in the hope that he would spend time at home and assume the baby was his, but he refused to have comforts his colleagues in the army could not. David therefore instructed his commander to put him on the front line.
- ✦ Nathan tells the story of the shepherd with a large flock and the man with the single lamb and it rouses David's wrath. **The man who has done this deserves to die.** Nathan simply responds, **you are the man!**
- ✦ David confesses his sin - but the punishment is that David will be spared but the child will die. The Psalmist tells us what we know - silence about our guilt eats us up from the inside out, but confession brings us release.

Go home and read Psalm 51 - that is David dealing with God after this event and even though God shows his forgiveness in Solomon, the second son of the relationship that should never have been, being chosen as David's heir, the cost of forgiveness was the life of another.

Paul works through the difference between the Old Covenant (which would have applied to David - living by rules) and the New Covenant of forgiveness through Jesus.

- ✦ The New Covenant pivots on the point that we are justified through faith (the point that Luther rediscovered). **Justified** is a technical legal word meaning *declared innocent* or *acquitted* - free from any wrong and guilt.

Faith is the means, not the source of justification.

Faith is trust.

It begins with knowledge, so it isn't blind.

It builds on facts, so it is not speculation.

It states its life on the outcome, so it is not impractical.

Faith is trusting Christ and proving his promises (Montgomery-Boice, in loc, Galatians).

- ✦ Paul then asks the question, *If we are acquitted, do we still have to be good?* The answer to that is simple - we aren't free from sin because of our actions, but because we are **In Christ**. It is a new life - not our old life made better. It is a different life not because we are *better people* but because **Christ lives in us**.

Jesus swaps our sin for his life lived out in us. A glorious truth!

The Gospel eventually gets to the point where forgiveness is celebrated, arriving at the point where Jesus declares **I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little.**

- ✦ Jesus had accepted the invitation of a Pharisee to eat with him, but had not been received with the proper etiquette of that culture - a bowl of water and a towel to wash dusty feet (Jewish slaves were not expected to wash feet); a kiss (replacing our handshake); oil (symbolising joy) as a necessary deodorant in a hot climate.
- ✦ A woman of ill-repute took the initiative and wept over Jesus feet; used her hair as a towel; kissed and kept kissing his feet; and used an expensive perfume to anoint him.
- ✦ Jesus deliberately antagonises his host - bound into the Old Covenant of rules - by declaring **your sins are forgiven** because the rules kept people in their place. Then Jesus goes on to declare **your faith has saved you; go in peace.**

Here religion meets faith head on - and religion loses!

We began with mistaken identity - Luther or Luther King - and have ended with it too: when religion passes for faith.

What we are looking for is for a community of forgiven people with a faith so clear that they are mistaken for Jesus, in whom they live and who lives in them.