

John Knox and the Protestant Reformation

The Protestant Reformation is about, educated Christian men within the Catholic Church, protesting against their church – the Catholic church. They did not want to leave their church. They did not want to destroy their church. Their faith was strong. Their study of the Scriptures was intense. But they firmly believed that a number of practices and beliefs of their church were either unjust, or not Biblically based, or both.

It is because of the Reformation that you know:

1. That you have the same access to God that I do;
2. That you do not need me to intercede on your behalf so that your sins might be forgiven or that your prayers might be heard and answered; and
3. That the church is called to be accountable with justice, mercy, honesty, grace, and compassion as its way of being.

There is much for which to be thankful in these truths!

These are some of the changes brought about by the Protesters who reformed the church, and they are big and significant changes. They did not come easily. It required amazing conviction and courage among the protesters. It often resulted in being abused, ostracized, tortured, or killed. It is important to appreciate the price the Reformers paid so that we can enjoy what the church has become. We have spent two Sundays learning something about the Protestant Reformation. We have talked about Martin Luther and John Calvin and today, on our last Sunday on the topic of the Protestant Reformation, we are going to take a look at John Knox.

Picture this geographically if you will - Germany - (who?) Martin Luther.

France and subsequently Switzerland - John Calvin.

Scotland – John Knox.

There were other Protesters or Reformers in other parts of Europe as well. Attempts to Reform had occurred before, but Luther, in the early

1500's was instrumental in bringing to fruition, what we now refer to as the Protestant Reformation.

Martin Luther was born in 1483, John Calvin in 1509, and John Knox in 1514. Each preceded the next in terms of their writings, preaching and impact on the Catholic church.

John Knox was born in 1514 and lived for 60 years. He is considered to be the one to bring the Protestant Reformation to Scotland and is one of the founders of the Presbyterian Church.

Knox was a controversial figure. He was sometimes described as a misogynist, a woman hater. Sometimes a fanatic. Sometimes a ruthless revolutionary.

He is thought of as arrogant, insolent, and a person given to harshness and cruelty. Even today, John Knox gets a great deal of bad press in Scotland. He is still blamed for various ills. But there is more to Knox than that, as there always is to a person. He was a man of paradox and was treated as such!

Knox was a minister of the Christian gospel, but he advocated for violent revolution. He was considered one of the most powerful and prolific preachers of his day, yet only two of his sermons were ever published. Although he is a key figure in the formation of modern Scotland, there is only one monument erected to him in Scotland. His grave, if you can believe it, lies beneath a parking lot.

Knox was born in a small town south of Edinburgh. He went to the University of St. Andrews and eventually went on to study theology. He was ordained in 1536 but became a lawyer and a tutor to the sons of the local Scottish nobility. Not the daughters, just the sons!

As he was growing up, Knox could not help but be aware of the unjust actions of the Catholic church. It owned more than half the real estate in Scotland, and gathered an annual income of nearly 18 times that of the government. Bishops and priests were often political, not religious appointments. Their immoral lives were never kept secret. The

Catholic Archbishop of St, Andrews, Cardinal Beaton, openly consorted with concubines and sired 10 children from a variety of women.

The influence of Martin Luther's work was spreading throughout Europe, England, France and Scotland. Patrick Hamilton, a student of Luther's writings, was an outspoken former Catholic who converted to Protestantism. At the hands of Cardinal Beaton, Hamilton was burned at the stake in 1528. Knox also was greatly influenced by Luther as well as other protesters and joined their ranks with much fervor. Knox became the right hand man of George Wishart who was a fiery protestant Scottish preacher.

Cardinal Beaton, the Archbishop of St. Andrew's, had Wishart arrested, tried, strangled, and burned. In response to this, 16 Protestors stormed St. Andrew's Castle, assassinated Cardinal Beaton and mutilated his body. They took over the castle, and although Knox was not present at Archbishop's murder, he certainly approved of it and during a break in the siege, he joined the besieged party in the castle.

St. Andrew's Castle was the birthplace of the first Protestant congregation. Have any of you been there? During a Protestant service there, Knox was asked to undertake the office of preacher. At first he was shaken and reduced to tears by the request. Eventually he submitted to what he felt was a divine call.

It was a short-lived ministry however. The year was 1546. In 1547 St. Andrews Castle, often a center of religious persecution and controversy, was taken again by the Catholics. Some of the occupants were imprisoned. Others, like Knox were sent to the galley as slaves. He spent 19 months there. When he was finally released he went to England where his reputation for preaching quickly blossomed. When Catholic Mary Tudor took the throne, Knox, having entered into an adversarial relationship with her, was forced to flee Scotland for France. From there he made his way to Switzerland where he met John Calvin. Calvin, the former French reformer referred to Knox as a brother....laboring energetically for the faith. Knox, for his part was so

impressed with the Christianity of Geneva that he called it, “the most perfect school of Christ that was ever on earth since the days of the apostles.”

From Geneva, Knox went to Germany to join other Protestors. But soon there was controversy as those gathered could not agree on an order of worship. It seems that the worship wars did not begin with contemporary verses traditional music in the church....they were there at the beginning. Arguments about worship became so heated, that one group stormed out of a church, refusing to worship in the same building as Knox.

Meanwhile back in Scotland, Protestant congregations were forming all over the country. A group of reformers who came to be called “The Lords of the congregation” vowed to make Protestantism the religion of the land. In 1555 they invited Knox to return to Scotland and to inspire the reformation movement. Knox spent nine months preaching

extensively and persuasively in Scotland before he was forced to return to Geneva.

While in Geneva, Knox wrote some of his most controversial tracts –

In **Admonition to England**, he attacked the leaders who allowed

Catholicism back in England. In **First Blast of the Trumpet Against the**

Monstrous Regiment of Women, he argued that a female ruler, like

English Queen Mary Tudor, with whom he had shared a number of fiery

conversations, was ‘most odious in the presence of God’, and that she

was ‘a traitoress and rebel against God’. Knox served as the religious

leader of the Protestant church throughout Mary’s reign. Eventually

Mary was imprisoned for her alleged role in the murder of her husband,

Lord Darnley. Knox openly called for her execution.

In **Appellations to the Nobility and Commonality of Scotland**, he

extended to ordinary people the right and indeed the duty, to rebel

against unjust rulers.

John Knox continued to preach throughout Scotland until his death in 1572.

So as odd as it is, on this day of Thanksgiving, I want us to give thanks for those who have gone before. Not only those at whose knee we may have been nurtured in the faith, but those who have gone before them. I want us to give thanks for those who fought and often lost their lives for the faith. I want us to give thanks for those who took the Bible seriously, and who studied it deeply and in earnest. I want us to give thanks for those who insisted that God is with us, around us and within. For those who pronounced unequivocally that our relationship with God is direct. It is not dependant upon any other person or any institution. The Reformers were courageous and determined to take a stand for what they knew was God's truth.

We are a Reformed Church. In our lifetime, may we be courageous enough to continue this essential endeavour. The Presbyterian Church in Canada – Reformed and Reforming. Amen

