

“In The Land Of The Birds”

In 1521, after his famous, “Here I stand” speech at the Diet of Worms, Martin Luther was condemned as a heretic by both the Pope and the Emperor. His life in danger, Luther was “captured” by his allies and secretly taken to the mountaintop castle of Wartburg. There, he was confined to his room until his beard and hair grew, and the professor and monk was transformed into “Knight George.”

Luther spent ten months at Wartburg, locked away, isolated. Letters were smuggled back and forth between Luther and his friends, carefully written so as not to disclose his whereabouts. He had time to think, and pray, and write, but he remained far removed from people, even within the castle, lest he be recognized and betrayed. He had no idea when, if ever, he’d be able to go back to Wittenberg or even risk being seen in public again.

In short, Luther was in quarantine.

No, there wasn’t a virus that kept him there, but there was the threat to his life. According to the law, anyone who found Luther had legal permission to kill him. And while Luther did know about the plot to “kidnap” him before it happened, his captors kept him under guard (for his own protection), so he couldn’t just leave. He was able to exercise, taking long walks through the fields and woods. He was able to write, and spent time working on several projects including a translation of the New Testament into German.

Perhaps above all, Luther was able to think and pray. “Here he was able to think things through and to evaluate truly the prophetic mission of his life with a clarity that was essential for the leader of the budding German Reformation. During the ten months at the Wartburg, all alone with his God, Luther the Reformer of later years was born” (Schwiebert, *Luther and His Times*, 520).

Luther referred to his room in the Wartburg as “my Patmos,” referencing the apostle John’s place of exile. From his west-facing window high atop the mountain, Luther could look out over the rolling hills, and it seemed to him (as he closed a number of his letters) as though he were dwelling in ‘the land of the birds.’” (518)

“In the land of the birds that sing sweetly in the branches and praise God with all their power night and day, Sunday, May 26, 1521. Yours, Martin.” That was how Luther signed a letter to his friend and colleague, Philip Melancthon. Even amid the loneliness, the isolation, Luther could see and hear the joy spilling forth from God’s creation, and find comfort and hope in those sounds.

My point? These days, it seems all of us are in various stages and types of quarantine. Some are kept from going out, while others can go out but have no place to go because so much is closed. We live under a constant threat (and fear?) of death, and we don’t know how long this is going to go on.

But we can exercise. We can watch TV or work on projects to keep busy. We can look out and listen to God’s creation as it sings its praises every day in so many different ways. And above all, we can think and pray.

So ask yourself: Where has your life been? What work has God put in front of you for you to do? What may be coming next, and how might you prepare for it? How can you best use your time in your “land of the birds” to learn more about God, His Word, and His will for you?