

Pastor T.C. Arnold
The Presentation of the Augsburg Confession
Matthew 10:26-33
June 22nd, 2014

The Gospel text appointed for this our special celebration of The Presentation of the Augsburg Confession – though the actual day the Reformers presented the Confession in the town of Augsburg German was June 25th, 1530 – gives instruction to the disciples (followers) who then were called apostles (sent) as they were being sent out to share the truth of the Gospel to the people. A few verses before our Gospel text Jesus tells the apostles, “*I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves*” (v.19). The honesty of Jesus would remind the apostles that their message of truth would be unpopular. Your life will be in jeopardy. You will have some uncomfortable situations. You will be persecuted for the sake of the Gospel that Jesus provides.

Now for anyone who has a pulse, this prospect is quite scary. So Jesus, in the text appointed for today, tells His “sent ones” not to fear – as a matter of fact, he says it three times. And the only reason Jesus would tell them “not to fear” is because there is something to fear. He even says, have no fear of those who could kill you. They can only kill the body. Oh right, why would we fear being killed? Because death is a scary prospect.

But what would be worth dying for? And if it is worth dying for would that mean death, for something that is worth it, would not be scary in those situations? Of course it would. Because something is worth dying for does not mean that fear is not part of the equation.

Now, for the reason we remember this day, which is probably not marked on your calendar at home – and there will be no gifts under the tree – the kids won’t be off school – you won’t be off work – you won’t hunt eggs (or something like that), is because a day like this we remember that there were Christians who stood up for what they believed. They presented a confession of their faith before men who could have them killed for telling them that they believe there were certain abuses in the church at that time – and that the Roman Church in that day had it wrong with certain tenets of the faith. Perhaps they were calling to mind what Jesus said to the disciples He was sending out to be apostles as sheep among wolves – telling them not to fear. I don’t know for sure, but I would guess, those reformers at Augsburg were scared.

What about you? Have you ever had to confront someone in fear? Maybe it didn’t even concern your faith. Maybe you have a boss you need to have a difficult conversation with. Maybe you are a student that needs courage to talk to a teacher about a class project or a test that is causes you a lot of stress. Perhaps you are a mother or a father or a son or a daughter that needs to have a true heart to heart discussion with someone you love about the fact that they are really hurting themselves by what they are doing or how they are hurting others.

But if it did concern your faith, would you still be scared? Would you be scared to share your faith –when God says something is wrong – when you hear or see someone doing something that the Lord would not approve of? Would you confess Jesus if it were unpopular to do so? Would you confess Jesus if someone were to threaten your life if you did? Would you stand up for what you believe in? That’s hard, isn’t it?

A couple of weeks ago we had confirmation. Eleven of our kids, and three adults the week before that, confessed that they would suffer all, even death, before confessing anything else than Jesus. They said, “By God’s grace, I do so intend.” We all confessed it – if you were confirmed. We all said the same thing. Do you realize that? I don’t think any of us have been in that position, and I pray that none of us ever are. But there are people around the world, every day, who confess their faith in the face of death – and sometimes they die. Jesus says “do not fear” because there are things – yes death but other things as well – that we fear.

This past week the youth of our congregation, along with a few youth of Our Redeemer in Kansas City, went to Colorado for a servant event doing fire mitigation at Lutheran Valley Retreat

Northwest of Colorado Springs. Next to the retreat is what is called Lutheran Valley Ranch, and people live in their homes or cabins on portions of property adjacent to the Retreat. On one of these properties a man by the name of Harry lives part-time with his wife. Harry is in his 80s and he was an original owner of the properties at the Ranch back in 1959. Harry was a Lutheran school teacher for years and loved the kids and the retreat. He lived a life of service – and for the people who know him, they say, he had a fearless faith. But Harry, in his fearlessness, would hardly ever accept the help of others, even when he needed it.

So, while he was away in another state, Our Christ Lutheran and Redeemer Lutheran kids went to work cutting dead timber and making huge piles of wood in order to be burned when the weather turns cold and wet. You see, that area had a fire back in 2002 that destroyed many trees that still needed to be cleaned up in order to mitigate any further fires that might come through. But 82 year old Harry wanted to do his own work. He wouldn't accept the help.

In comes the youth of Christ Lutheran. Also a man by the name of Bob – a neighbor. Bob, an elderly gentlemen himself, came alongside the youth with chainsaw in hand to clear out all the dead wood. He said, "When Todd from the Lutheran Valley Retreat called me and said we were going to help Harry clear off his property to help mitigate fires, I couldn't get to my chainsaw fast enough." Then he said, "I know when Harry gets back, I will have to face the music for helping him. But that's okay, because I have the opportunity to serve a true servant."

Bob would have to "face the music" because Harry didn't really want the help – even though he really needed it. And really facing fear is all the same in servant-hood and faith. Facing the fear of serving your neighbor – or – facing the fear of confessing faith in the midst of great persecution. The point is, beloved, it doesn't have to be "to the death" – but rather might be to the one who might not receive our service or word well – or – to others when it might even be a little uncomfortable for us – as such words and work benefit those around us.

Do not fear. Live in your faith. Live out your faith. Turn from that which causes you great harm in sin and live in Christ. Live in the living Christ. He lives in you. Today, our Lord gives Evalena a living faith. To a child? Yes, to a child. God gifts it and this will be a faith that she lives as her parents teach her about what has happened to day. A fearless faith because it is a faith that relies on the truth – the truth that Jesus is Lord of all.

One morning last week we hiked up Cedar Mountain not far from the camp. It was a difficult climb – and, at some points, we were climbing. At the top of the mountain was a cross – a simple wooden cross – yet quite large. One of our camp counselors – an 18 year old girl we called Shuzzam told the story of how her father, when he was 14 years old and a camper at Lutheran Valley Retreat, took a wooden cross, hiked up that mountain, and put it the same spot that the current cross was standing in. In her devotion, telling us that story, she made a very good point. She said "that carrying that cross up that difficult mountain climb must have been hard for those kids years ago. But just think how hard Jesus' climb up the mount called Calvary, with His cross, must have been for you." Well said.

Without fear, Jesus climbed that mount to die for you. Without fear we can confess Jesus is Lord of all – because that is the truth – in the midst of our own fears. And we know we can go to Him will all that we fear – for He still cares for us – and will comfort us – and will give us a peace that goes beyond understanding. Jesus says, I am now sending you... have no fear. Confess with your tongue – believe in your heart – that Jesus is Lord. May God richly bless you and keep you and guard you in the times we most surely need Him. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.