

Sermon for the Presentation of the Augsburg Confession – Matthew 10:26-33

In the Name of the Father and of the Son ✠ and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

In a year already chocked full of anniversaries for our parish-family and the Lutheran Church throughout the world, please permit me just one more remembrance. Oh no, pastor, not another! 60 years of Christ Lutheran, 500 years of the Reformation, now what? 487 years. Yep, on June 25th 1530, 7 princes and dukes as well as 2 city governing bodies in Germany presented to Emperor Charles V the Augsburg Confession. This document showed the pure light of Christian truth both in its continuity with the doctrines always confessed by the historic church and by pointing out where the church had erred and gone astray. In connection with the Reformation's 500 years which we celebrate on October 31st, when Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses against indulgences, prayer to the saints, and other abuses, June 25th, the presentation of the Augsburg Confession should not be forgotten. In medical terms, if Luther's 95 theses and the Reformation are the diagnosis of the disease, the Augsburg Confession is the cure.

Nevertheless, if it be today or October 31st, it's still a good chance for us Lutherans to ask ourselves the question of WHY we are Lutherans. It's a time to relive the past and make it come alive in the present and reestablish the foundation for future generations. We are here today because certain officials of the Holy Roman Empire thought their faith was important enough to risk their lives, possessions, and titles. What happened at Augsburg in 28 confessed articles happened for us upon whom the ends of the earth have now come.

Celebrating these Lutheran holidays can become a sort of slippery parochial slope. Lutherans celebrate the Reformation and the Augsburg Confession because we're Lutheran and that's what we do. We keep to ourselves. But the greatness of the Augsburg Confession is not that it's narrowly denominational; rather, it affirms the historic and ecumenical faith of the ancient church in the present and future church. Lutherans believe what Christians have always believed. At the end of Article 21, the confessors state that their faith doesn't deviate from the Scriptures or the historic church. In reading it, we couldn't guess that it was drafted in 16th century Germany. There's no mention of sauerkraut, bratwurst, or Bavarian ales. Rather, it resembles the Apostle's and Nicene Creeds which were written in time, but not for only that time. The Augsburg Confession, too, gives expression to the faith that we and Christians everywhere have believed.

Those brave confessors at Augsburg gave to the church no new doctrine, but simply restated the old with the overriding principal that God forgives all mankind freely, through faith, for the sake of Jesus Christ's death on the cross. This truth permeates every article: God accepts us sinners for Christ's sake. Because of the Augsburg Confession, we see above all else that whatever God reveals to us in the Bible His chief purpose is redeeming us sinners.

Other churches teach that God only embraces holy and righteous people. Baloney. God embraces us sinners in the very filthiness of our sin. We have rebelled in our hearts. We have cursed God with our mouths. We have willfully disregarded His Law and secretly loved our vices and sins. Even still, St. Paul says God loved us while we were yet sinners. St. John says God loved the world in the very condition of the world hating Him. God's love for us sinners remains unaltered. He remains love.

From 1517 to the few decades that followed, men who were born Catholics were making Lutheran confessions. When those princes and municipal officials stood before the emperor, they were confessing really nothing new. Those confessors took seriously the words of an ancient creed that we still take seriously today. About 400 A.D. some Christians at Nicaea said, "... who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate." God does everything for us. This is the real faith of Augsburg. Again, the Augsburg Confession means that God now exists for us sinners.

Even if we have never and have no plans to go to Germany, this faith lives on in us today. Jesus, too, died in a foreign place long ago. But He still incorporates His sacrifice into us through Holy Baptism and the Sacrament of the Altar so that each of us may know that He accepts us, loves us, and forgives us.

Interestingly, the presenters of the Augsburg Confession to the Emperor Charles V were not greatly knowledgeable theologians and none of them were pastors. Though placed in noble positions, all were considered laymen. Nevertheless, they stood alone in confessing their faith before kings. The confessors of Augsburg heard the message of the Gospel and with full confidence believed that salvation was of Jesus Christ alone. These men staked their fortunes and honor, these men staked their lives on what they believed.

God doesn't provide a Martin Luther or the brave confessors at Augsburg in every age, but we can see this fortitude in certain people today. In March of this year, a Lutheran municipal court judge in the state of Wyoming named Ruth Neely was publically censured and prohibited to perform any marriage ceremony because she holds to the belief that marriage should be between 1 man and 1 woman only. Though never asked, she would not perform a marriage for same-sex couples which is still the tragic law in our land. Judge Neely gave a clear statement of her faith in Jesus Christ. She said that for God marriage is between 1 man and 1 woman only. She spoke before the authorities in our land and the authorities did not believe. Still, she will not deny the Lord who has kept His promise to her. God may not provide bold presenters at Augsburg in every age or for every church, but He does provide men and women who speak the truth in the church and society when it is politically inexpedient to do so. Our celebration of the Augsburg Confession demands no less.

For God also makes His promise to us: "So have no fear of them, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known ... And do not fear those who can kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not 2 sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father ... Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows. So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven." Go forth in your life and put His promise to the test. Amen.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. ✠BJF✠