

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our heavenly Father, through the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today's sermon is based on the Augsburg Confession, which is commemorated every year on the 25th of June, which is later this week. We'll hear more about it shortly. For now, let's pray...

Dear Heavenly Father, send your Holy Spirit upon us so that we may be courageous enough to acknowledge your Son, Jesus Christ, before others. Amen.



Every now and again we might be asked a question such as: 'What is a Lutheran?' or 'What do Lutherans believe?'

How would you answer this?

Some of you may be tempted to say you've always been Lutheran because your parents dragged you along to church and wouldn't give you another option. Others might say you married into the church or that it was the closest church to you when you were growing up. Some of you may say Lutherans believe the same as any other Christian church as we all believe in the same God.

Unfortunately, many Lutherans don't know how to answer questions about why we're Lutheran in any meaningful way, and if we attempt to give an answer, we may not end up saying what Lutherans actually confess to be true!

Historically we're people who believe the Scriptures are vital for us and everything we do. We always carefully search the Scriptures to test every ritual and tradition which has been passed down to us, as well as every new teaching which is introduced.

If a teaching, ritual, or tradition clearly communicates, or points to, Jesus Christ and his gifts, then it's often ok, but if it points to our own efforts in any way, shape, or form, then we often reject it.

Even in those broad areas where something is neither commanded or forbidden, we still carefully consider how it might (or might not) be consistent with the grace of Jesus Christ.

This foundation of testing and basing all our teachings on the Word of God alone, which points to Christ alone, which is received through faith alone, is deeply imbedded into who we are as Lutherans. If any of these foundations change, then we're no longer Lutheran.

What helps us to define what we as Lutherans believe (and what we don't believe) is written down in a carefully crafted statement of belief presented to Emperor Charles V on the 25th of June 1530, around 495 years ago.

What might surprise us is that it wasn't the pastors or bishops of the church who made this bold confession in front of their Emperor, but it was the German princes. They were lay people who believed they were acknowledging their faith in Jesus Christ in front of the world by confessing what they believed God's Word clearly proclaimed.

They wanted to point to Jesus because the Roman Catholic church at the time, along with other emerging Reformation churches, such as the Baptists, weren't pointing clearly to him.

What they confessed to be true in a town named Augsburg (hence the 'Augsburg Confession') is still true for us today and, as we consider what they said, we may like to consider: Is this what Scripture confesses to be true? And if so, is this what we also believe to be true?

The following is a paraphrase of the Augsburg Confession's articles:

- I. God is three persons (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) in one divine essence. We reject any teaching which says otherwise.
- II. All human beings are born with the inborn sickness of sin (which means sin is more than just thinking, saying, or doing the wrong things) and, as sinful beings, we don't naturally trust God. We reject any teaching which denies the inborn inclination to sin is sin (by which people think they can make themselves righteous before God by their own natural powers), because any thought of co-operating with God's grace for our salvation takes away from the glory and work of Christ.
- III. Jesus Christ is truly the Son of God who also truly took on human nature, which means he has two natures (both divine and human at the same time) which can't be separated. This 'God-man' suffered, was crucified, died, and truly rose again from the dead in order that all human beings might be reconciled to God the Father.
- IV. No human being can be justified by God by their own powers, merits or works; but is given this righteousness as a gift only through faith in Jesus Christ.
- V. To obtain this saving faith (which makes people justified before God), God instituted the ministry of preaching and administering the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, which are the instruments of the Holy

Spirit to create faith and communicate the historic work of Christ to us. We reject any teaching which suggests the Holy Spirit comes to humans separately from the Word of God by our own preparations, thoughts, or works.

- VI. The faith created through these means will yield the Spiritual fruit of good works (which are commanded by God), but no-one should trust these fruit for their salvation. Since we're saved by faith alone, good works are a sign of saving faith, but they're not a way for us to work toward salvation.
- VII. There's only one true Church and the external signs of this Church is where the teaching of the Gospel is kept pure and the sacraments are administered rightly, even if man-made traditions or ceremonies differ from place to place.
- VIII. The Church is best understood as an assembly of people who gather where God's Word is purely proclaimed and the Sacraments are rightly administered, even though false Christians, hypocrites and public sinners may exist within that assembly. We also reject any teaching which suggests the ministry of unfaithful or unrighteous people is useless and ineffective.
- IX. Since Baptism is God's gracious gift which communicates the benefits of Christ's life, death, and resurrection to us, it's necessary for salvation and therefore children should also be baptised. We reject those who teach the baptism of children isn't right.
- X. We believe the body and blood of Christ are truly present in the Lord's Supper. We reject any teaching which suggests otherwise.
- XI. The historic practice of private confession and absolution of sin should continue to be offered, although it's not necessary to list every single sin when we do so.
- XII. Even when someone falls into sin after baptism, the forgiveness of sins should never be denied to the repentant. In this case repentance is understood to mean both contrition and sorrow which troubles the conscience, as well as faith that God will forgive sins on account of Christ which calms and consoles the conscience. We reject any teaching which suggests once we have become righteous we can't sin again.
- XIII. The sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper aren't just recognised signs for Christians to use, but they're also testimonies of God's will toward us which are intended to arouse and strengthen faith.
- XIV. No one should publicly teach, preach, or administer the sacraments

without a rightly ordered call.

- XV. We may keep any of the historic traditions of the Church if they serve peace and good order, but people should never be burdened to keep them as if their salvation depends on them. This means any human traditions, teachings, rituals, rules, or practices which are instituted with the hope of winning God's grace or favour through our own performance or works are good for nothing and, even worse, they oppose the gospel.
- XVI. Christians are permitted to serve in courts, as politicians, as judges, as soldiers, and are allowed to marry, etc because all lawful vocations are given by God where we may produce good works as the fruit of faith. We reject any teaching which says Christians should be prohibited from these areas of service. We also reject any teaching which says Christian perfection means we should leave our families or avoid any civil service, because we believe these are also ordered by God and aren't overthrown by the gospel.
- XVII. Christ will return on the Last Day to judge and to raise all the dead. Those who trust in Jesus will receive eternal life and joy, but the ungodly will be condemned to endless torment. We reject any teaching which says all devils and the condemned won't suffer eternal torment. We also reject any teaching which says the righteous will first take possession of a secular kingdom here on earth in order to suppress the ungodly.
- XVIII. All humans have a free will to reason and live good and honourable lives, but since righteousness is only created through faith by the operation of the Holy Spirit, this means no one except those who have faith are pleasing to God, no matter how good they are.
- XIX. The blame for sin rests solely with the devil and our own perverted will, not with God.
- XX. To make it quite clear about good works, no one can be reconciled to God or merit grace or forgiveness through their own works, performance of rituals, or any other human deed because it is only faith in Jesus Christ that saves, but at the same time, good works should and must be done because this is the will of God. The good works one is able to perform don't merit salvation and shouldn't be relied on for God's favour or forgiveness. On the other hand, as a result of the Holy Spirit's work (which produces faith), the heart of the righteous will be moved to do good works.
- XXI. The saints of the past may be remembered in order that we may imitate their faith and good works, but we should never call on the saints or plead for their help because Christ is our only mediator, high priest, intercessor, advocate, and atoning sacrifice through whom we pray to the Father.

They also wrote a number of other articles concerning receiving both the body and blood in the Lord's Supper, the marriage of priests, the Mass, Confession, the distinction of foods, Monastic vows, and the power of Bishops.

Unfortunately, despite this bold statement of faith, over the coming years disputes arose between Lutherans which threatened their unity. Again, they went back to the Scriptures and, fifty years after the Augsburg Confession was given, a much larger group of pastors and lay people signed a document called the Formula of Concord which reconciled and further explained some of our key teachings. Again, they clearly point to our Lord Jesus Christ and his Word.

As members of this Lutheran congregation, you also agree the bible is God's true Word which offers life, truth, forgiveness, and hope. You agree God's Word is your only source and norm for all matters of faith, life, and doctrine. You agree God's Word points you to Jesus Christ so that his Spirit may work saving faith in you and move you to do good works. You agree the Sacraments communicate the grace of God to you.

You also agree the Book of Concord, which includes the Augsburg Confession and the Formula of Concord (along with the Small and Large Catechisms and other essential Lutheran teachings), is a true exposition of God's Word.

Why do you agree with these writings?

Partly because it's written into our constitution as a basis for our unity, but also because you agree God's Word nourishes and renews your soul like life-giving water. You agree because God's Word does what it says; and that it's brought you forgiveness, salvation, life, peace and hope. You agree because you want to acknowledge Jesus Christ before others with clarity in a way which is consistent with God's Word.

So then, now that you know these things, if anyone asks, 'Why are you a Lutheran?', what are you going to say?

As you confidently confess our Lord Jesus Christ before others, may the peace of God, which surpasses all human understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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South Burnett Lutheran Parish
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