

Why I Am A Lutheran

St. Mark Lutheran
Two services (summer schedule)

Pastor Ken Welsh
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Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope in the glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation. Romans 5:1-11

Grace and peace to you this day from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

I tried to choose carefully for my last two messages here at St. Mark as Associate Pastor. In last week's message, "God's Beautiful Creation", I wanted to recognize the greatness of God as shown in his creation of heaven and earth. In this message, I seek to explain God's great plan of salvation and how that has impacted my life. That impact is intertwined with the ministry of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod; hence I speak on "Why I Am A Lutheran" today.

I was baptized into Christ on April 4, 1949, and confirmed my faith in Christ on April 3, 1955. This was one of many important results of my mother listening to Dr. Walter A Maier on a radio program called the Lutheran Hour. My mother was not brought up to be a Christian but became one through the ministry of God's Word on the Lutheran Hour. Then one Sunday Dr. Maier preached on the importance of finding a church home that emphasized the Gospel about Jesus Christ and believed in all of the Bible. The first church she tried was a LCMS church and she never needed to go anywhere else after that.

So let me list that as the number one reason I am a Lutheran. Our church takes seriously the "Great Commission" printed at the end of the Gospel of Matthew. It says, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." (Matthew 28:19-20) Without that ministry in our lives, I might never have known Jesus as my Savior.

The Lutheran Hour is a fine example of a great effort to help carry out the "Great Commission". It started around 1930 and is the longest radio Gospel outreach in the history of the world. You may be amazed to hear that it all started here in Cleveland, Ohio, of all places, with the first broadcast being on WHK radio. During Dr. Maier's time it was on over 1200 radio stations. I don't know what the actual numbers are, but I would guess that God has used it change the lives of tens of thousands of people, maybe many more, including a number on my family tree. It is broadcast in many countries overseas as well as in the United States. If you are open to financially supporting something solid, you can look for "The Lutheran Hour" on Google.

Martin Luther was the catalyst God used to start the Lutheran Church. It is a matter of historical record that his intention was not to start a "Lutheran" church, but to reform the church of that day and bring its teachings back to being based solely on the Holy Scriptures. He coined three terms which eventually sparked the Reformation. The three terms were Sola Gratia ("only by grace alone"), Sola Fide ("only through faith alone"), and Sola Scriptura ("only through the Scriptures alone").

The true Lutheran church teaches that salvation is by grace alone. This is the clear teaching of the Holy Scriptures. Many human books and religions teach salvation by works and deeds done in our lives. Some also teach that our salvation is brought about by a combination of what Jesus did and the good works that we do. This is also false teaching.. The Apostle Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:8-9, "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. If you need more than that, then read Titus 3:4-7 also.

Sola Fide is important because by faith we access the grace of God that is bestowed on us through the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ on the cross. Faith is NOT something that is generated in our lives by the efforts of sinful human beings. It is actually a gift of God. How do we get this gift? Romans 10:17 is very clear on that: "faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ." What is the result of this? Our reading from Romans 5 this morning tells us. "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Verse eight says, "but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Our holy God demands payment for our sins, and Jesus paid it.

The third sola that formed the basis of the Reformation is Sola Scriptura, "only through the Scriptures alone". God saw to it that a record of mankind's creation, fall into sin, God's promise of a Savior, and his work and revelations through both his prophets and apostles has been recorded for us and brought together in the Holy Scriptures. Thus the Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."

Luther was very aware of this passage and also of how God works through his word. He was concerned because in his day the people did not have the Bible to read on their own. It was only read and taught by priests and approved religious teachers. So he translated the Bible into the language of his people. He also wrote a catechism so the head of the house could teach the saving word to his family at home. This is another important legacy of the Lutheran Church.

A true Lutheran is, as Luther put it, "captive to the Word of God". The Rev. Daniel Preus, one of six vice-presidents of the LCMS, puts it this way: "A true Lutheran does not judge the Written Word. He lets himself, his heart, his mind and conscience be judged by the Word. He rejects his own thoughts and conclusions if they militate against the Written Word. He stands in awe of the Word. He trembles at it. The Written Word of Scripture is to him as absolutely holy as God himself." I stand right along with the Rev. Daniel Preus on this.

Most important of all, Jesus Christ fully supported the authority and revelation of the Old Testament. He is quoted in Matthew 5 as saying, "For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished." In his conversation with the Jewish leaders, he upheld the writings of Moses and the prophets. And of his own words he said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away." (Luke 21:33) Those who add to or take away from what the Holy Scriptures say are taking a terrible risk.

I am a Lutheran Christian because our church is one of the few denominations left which still believes and teaches that the Genesis account is a historical account of our creation and fall into sin. Please note that in 2 Timothy 4:3, we are warned that the time will come when people will drift away from God's Word and listen to false teachers. Many of my colleagues and myself believe that that time has now come.

Our Lutheran church congregations teach there was a Garden of Eden, that Adam and Eve really existed, that Satan exists (Jesus Christ made it very clear that Satan exists), and that man disobeyed God and by so doing brought sin and death into the world.

I am a Lutheran Christian because of the emphasis that we put on the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. God has spoken to us through his prophets and apostles, and he has given us the Bible and the two Sacraments through which he ministers to us and spiritually deals with us.

I strongly support the baptism of infants because it is a work of God that promises forgiveness of sins and the Holy Spirit, and infants need those things. Furthermore, I notice that the apostles went and baptized entire households in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Back in Old Testament days, parents were commanded to bring their children to be dedicated on the eighth day of their birth and those children were then under God's covenant with his people at that time. This surely tells us something about God and infants.

I also strongly support our church's teachings that we receive the body and blood of Christ in and under the bread and the wine in the Lord's Supper. A great principle of Lutheran interpretation of Holy Scriptures is that "Scripture interprets Scripture". So while Christ's words in Matthew, Mark, and Luke can possibly be interpreted two ways, we receive clarification of that with Paul's words in 1 Corinthians where he speaks of our participation in the body and blood of Christ. Furthermore, he mentions all four substances: the bread, the wine, the body and the blood. That is where true Lutherans stand; that all four substances are there. Also, in John 6, Christ states this: "For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink." The Jews even give support to this interpretation because they disputed among themselves asking, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" (Read John 6:41-59 for more important information)

I close my preaching days as Associate Pastor at St. Mark Lutheran Church with the following cherished words from Luther's explanation of the Third Article of the Apostles Creed in his Small Catechism. His explanation has to do with the work of the Holy Spirit. "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way he calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. This is, I believe, most certainly true. Amen.

Pastor Ken Welsh

