

Why I am a Lutheran



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Why am I a Lutheran? It's about the Gospel. It's about a God, looking with love on a broken creation—looking at sinful humanity and knowing they can't save themselves. So He steps down, takes their weakness, their sin upon Himself and suffers in their place. Jesus, the Great High Priest, becomes the Sacrificial Lamb. And He dies.

But He doesn't stay dead. The One crucified on the cross is the same One who walks out of a tomb three days later. He conquers death with life, and He gives that life to all who trust in Him. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus," writes St. Paul. "God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of His blood—to be received by faith" (Romans 3:23-25).

The Lutheran Church has ever stood as the staunch defender of the Gospel. When much of the world was confused on this point, the Reformers were clear. "Our churches teach that people cannot be justified before God by their own strength, merits or works," Philip Melancthon explains in The Augsburg Confession. "People are freely justified for Christ's sake, through faith, when they believe that they are received into favour and that their sins are forgiven for Christ's sake. By His death, Christ made satisfaction for our sins. God counts this faith for righteousness in his sight (Romans 3 and 4)."

This Gospel—Christ dying and rising for you—is the central message of all Scripture. And it isn't just history; it's a living, breathing story, the story of

every Christian in every time in every place. Where it is proclaimed, God is present and active creating faith. "Let there be," God said in the beginning, and the world was. "Let there be," He speaks in the Gospel, and faith is born—the Holy Spirit kindling hearts with the Word of God.

The Reformers understood this well, and so their writings point us ever back to Christ. In fact, all other doctrines and practices of the Church flow from the message of God's free gift of salvation. What are the sacraments but the manifestation of God's grace and forgiveness? He takes the water He has made and the Word He has spoken, and unites us to the death and resurrection of Christ. "Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?" St. Paul asks. "We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life" (Romans 6:3-4).

In that new life, Jesus invites us to see His Father as our own Father. Like children who have erred, He calls us to confess our sin, teaching us to pray: "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us" (Matthew 6:12). And He Himself offers us that blood-bought forgiveness. "Neither do I condemn you," he says to the woman caught in sin. "Go and sin no more." (John 8:11). He says the same to us, both in the Scriptures and in the Church.

"Touch me," He says elsewhere to a doubting disciple. "Put your fingers in my side. Feel the holes" (cf. John 20:27). Two thousand years later,

He turns to us too. "Touch me," he says. "This is my body. This is my blood. Take and eat. Take and drink. Taste and see that the Lord is good" (cf. Matthew 26:26-28, Psalm 34:8). And we do. We feed at the feast of forgiveness, eating the Gospel itself.

No matter where we go or what we do, Lutherans know the Gospel of Jesus Christ is at the heart of every aspect of faith. It's the thing that makes intimacy with God possible. It's the thing that ties us to our brothers and sisters in Christ too—to those in the pew beside you, yes, but also to those throughout the long history of the Church, from the founders of your local church, to the Reformers, to the Martyrs, all the way back to the Apostles themselves.

As we move towards 2017, let's rededicate ourselves to proclaiming the Gospel with the same zeal that typified Martin Luther and the other reformers. This issue of *The Canadian Lutheran* may help you on that front. Dr. Threinen reminds us that history—especially Reformation history—matters in the here and now. Dr. Kettner gives us a prime example, bringing us the life story of Johann Bugenhagen, a lesser known Reformer. Rev. Quast meanwhile encourages us to commit to study the Lutheran confessions this year. And President Bugbee invites us to make the 500th anniversary of the Reformation a special time of prayer.

It is my hope that this issue's articles—and the study and prayer that go with them—will help remind you why you too are Lutheran. But if you ever need a summary, remember this: it's about the Gospel.