

Grow in Grace: Presentation of the Augsburg Confession

In the Name of our dear Savior, Jesus, my brothers and sisters in Him:

The Word of God for our meditation as we celebrate the Presentation of the Augsburg Confession is today's Gospel:

Matthew 10:32-39

³² *"Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven. ³³ But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven.*

³⁴ *"Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. ³⁵ For I have come to turn*

*" 'a man against his father,
a daughter against her mother,
a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—*

³⁶ *a man's enemies will be the members of his own household.'*

³⁷ *"Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. ³⁸ Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹ Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.*

The Gospel of the Lord

Sing "Happy birthday to you! Happy birthday to you! Happy birthday dear Lutheran Church. Happy birthday to you!" Happy birthday! Did you know we can call June 25th the birthday of the Lutheran Church? It was on this day in 1530 that the Lutheran confessors stood before the Emperor, Charles V, and representatives of the papacy, all who had gathered at the southern German city of Augsburg. There humbly, boldly those reformers presented their confession of the true faith – God tells us clearly in his Word that all people are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in the Scriptures alone. When those earthly powers rejected that confession and the proposed reforms to the Roman Catholic Church that came with it, it became apparent that those confessors would not be able to rejoin a church that had rejected God's Word, that had rejected God's plan of salvation through his Son, Jesus Christ alone. And so, in this way the Lutheran church was born.

In some ways it's a sad way, right? Because there was division; because God's truth was denied even as his messengers proclaimed it faithfully. And yet, we can stand back in wonder that those reformers **spoke up for the Son**. They spoke Jesus' truth because that is what Jesus, through his Word, had called them to do.

We don't really like division, do we? If you're like me...all of the pain and contentiousness that our nation is going through right now...that hurts. And many would like to think that, of all places where you could find peace, it would be with religion. You've probably seen those bumper stickers, "Coexist" and it's got symbols from major religions making up the letters of the Word.

And yet...did you hear the words that Jesus spoke to us today? He said, *"Don't even begin to think that I came to bring peace on the earth. I came to bring a sword!"* Wow, that grabs our attention! What about the message that the angels sang on the night he was born, "Peace on earth"? How can Jesus say that he did not come to bring peace?

To help explain it all, let's see what was going on around our text. Not too long before this, Jesus began preaching and teaching in the northern territory of Galilee. There he called his first disciples to follow him. And it was there, as he was heading from village to village, that he was filled with a deep compassion for the people living there. They needed to know that God's promised Messiah had come. That's why Jesus was there – this is God's gracious heart, that though we are guilty and have done nothing but to deserve his punishment because we are not holy like he is, he loved us anyway. The reason that the angels sang at Jesus' birth is because Jesus had come to bring peace between us and God. To be our perfection and to be punished in our place for our guilt. The angels praised God because God was putting his plan to save humanity into action.

As Jesus looked out on those Galilean villages, he saw so many people who needed to know who he is and why he had come so that, through this message, they would be brought to faith in him as their Savior. To help him in this task, Jesus sent out his disciples with the promise that, when they would **speak up for the Son**, when they would speak his Word in his name, they would be speaking with his authority and they would be speaking with his power. And the Holy Spirit would work through the message proclaimed by those disciples to create faith, to give forgiveness, to give eternal peace.

That's why, when he sent them out, Jesus said, *"Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven."*

In other words, believers in Jesus speak their faith in their Savior with their mouths and in their actions—it's what we do and what we were made for. By God's Holy Spirit, we have the same deep, heartfelt compassion for all people that our Savior-God has. In particular, we have a deep concern for those who are lost in unbelief. As freely as we have received the grace of God that has taken our guilt away, so we freely share it. Jesus raises the difficult question, "if the signs of (spiritual) life aren't there (speaking your faith), is life there at all? Who in your life needs to hear about their Savior Jesus—a friend, a neighbor, a colleague, a member of your family? Rejoicing that you know the truth, **speak up for the Son** with the full assurance that when the Last Day comes, and you stand before him face to face, he will speak up about you to his Father, "I know this one! He/She is my very own, bought with my own blood. In this faith, this believer rejoiced to speak up about me. Let's bring him/her to the glory I won for and promised to them."

Now, just because we speak in Jesus' name, and with his authority and power, doesn't mean that our lives in this world will always be easier because we represent Jesus. In fact, he tells us our lives are likely going to be harder **when we speak up about him** as we bear our crosses in his name. Look at Jesus' own life. The Savior of the world. He came to give us heaven, and for it, he was laughed at, rejected, arrested, beaten, and executed. As Jesus sent out his disciples, he told them, "If these things are going to happen to me, they are going to happen to you too because you represent me." The Apostle Paul tells us that the mind of an unbeliever is hostile to God and that God's message sounds like utter foolishness.

Which brings us back to that sword that Jesus mentions in these verses. It isn't a physical sword that Jesus is talking about here, and he's certainly not advocating violence in his name. Think of the sword that the Apostle Paul talks about in Ephesians 6. There he tells us that we are armed with the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. Think of how this Word convicts of sin and guilt and holds all people accountable to a just God, a God who has promised that he will punish sin and unbelief. Think of the hostility that those who reject this Word often react with when they hear it. This negative reaction to Jesus and his truth is what causes the division that Jesus describes in these verses. The cross believers bear is the pain and sorrow we face in this ruined world because we bear the name of the one who has made peace between God and us and because all the forces of hell will fight against this message with all that they have inside them for as long as they can.

An example of this is Jesus' own disciples, many of whom would be persecuted and lose their lives because they **spoke up for the Son**. Another example? Those reformers 490 years ago presenting their

confession at Augsburg to men who could destroy them—their properties, their families, their lives—all for the joy, all for the privilege, all for the grace-borne desire to **speak up clearly for the Son**. It is by grace alone that we are saved! This truth is our most precious treasure.

Sadly, we must confess that sometimes this is easier said, right? To **speak up for the Son**. Think about those people in your life that I mentioned just a little while ago—that neighbor, that friend, that family member. Have we taken those opportunities to tell them about our Savior, or have we been afraid of the cost? What they might think of us, what they might do to us, what we might lose if we do speak. And then we hear those hard words of Jesus in our text for today, “Whoever loves anything, any relationship in this world more than me, is not worthy of me,” and our heart grieves, like Peter after the rooster crowed, and Jesus looked at him. We confess that we have not always put God first; we have been more afraid of whatever consequences speaking up for the Son might bring more than we have loved the Son himself.

My dear brothers and sisters in Jesus, in spite of our guilt, God loved you and me anyway. That’s why he sent his Son. Jesus put his Father first. Every time. Jesus spoke his Word of truth without fear of what his worldly enemies might do or say. Then Jesus went to the cross, credited with our faithlessness, and was punished in full. Hear his Word of truth—in him, your guilt is taken away, and you are forgiven. In Christ, his righteousness is credited as your very own. He will testify to this for you before his Father on the Last Day. Eternal life is yours because Jesus won it, and Jesus has given it to you.

And it is that joy, that peace, that moves us to speak. We follow the one who bore his cross for us, went to the grave...and then came out once again for us, who ascended to heaven and rules all things for us. Who will return...for us. Oh, so we speak because we want as many as possible to rejoice with us.

We thank God for his mercy that preserves his Word from one generation to the next. We thank God for his faithful witnesses, from his disciples to those reformers at Augsburg to those very special people who spoke his Word of truth to you and me. And in his faithful love, we consider it pure joy to **speak up for the Son**. Happy birthday indeed! Amen