

22 October 2017 – 20th Sunday after Pentecost. “Would Luther Be a Lutheran?”



Theme: 1 Thessalonians 1:7, “And so **you became a model** to all the believers...” **LOL**: “For him, the church is essentially the life and ministry of the local congregation: ‘Now, wherever you hear or see this word preached, believed, professed, and lived, do not doubt that the true *ecclesia sancta catholica*, a Christian holy people’ must be there even though their number is very small.’ Luther expands on this basic understanding of the church in answering a most basic question for Christians: ‘But how will or how can a poor confused person tell where such Christian holy people are to be found in this word?’”



I. THE WORD.

Luther: “First, the holy Christian people are recognised by their possession of the holy word of God.” Luther always returned to the foundational importance of the Scriptures and the gospel in his approach to any doctrinal question. The church must have and cherish the revelation of God. And even if there were no other sign than this alone, it would still suffice to prove that a Christian, holy people exist there, for God’s word cannot be without God’s people, and conversely, God’s people cannot be without God’s word.”

James Pautz: *Would Luther Approve of Lutherans Today?* “Another serious problem in the ELCA is that of the authority of the Bible... Modern ELCA members find it easy to interpret the Bible differently than what has been done since the Reformation... Some are in the habit of believing that as long as you have faith, anything we do in this world does not matter for our eternal soul... Applying the Gospel in place of Law leads to indifference on issues of the Law, such as homosexuality, abortion, and basic Christian living... The third function of the Law (as guide) is the one most easily ignored by those in the ELCA... Dr. Carl Braaten believes that natural law is almost non-existent in the current ELCA. The influences of modern politically correctness and accept-all morality have definitely impacted the ELCA.”



II. BAPTISM.

Luther: “Second, God’s people or the Christian holy people are recognized by the holy sacrament of baptism, wherever it is taught, believed, and administered correctly according to Christ’s ordinance.”



III. THE LORD’S SUPPER.

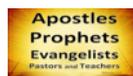
Luther: “Third, God’s people, or Christian holy people, are recognized by the holy sacrament of the altar, wherever it is rightly administered, believed, and received, according to Christ’s institution.. This too is a public sign and a precious, holy possession left behind by Christ by which his people are sanctified so that they also exercise themselves in faith and openly confess that they are Christian, just as they do with the word and baptism.”



IV. DISCIPLINE.

Luther: “Fourth, God’s people or holy Christians are recognized by the office of the keys exercised publicly. That is, as Christ decrees in Matthew 18, if a Christian sins, he should be reprovved; and if he does not mend his ways, he should be bound in his sin and cast out. If he does mend his ways, he should be absolved. That is the office of the keys.”

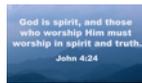
LOL: For Luther, the real church exercised discipline over its members. This element of Luther’s understanding has often been missed, but he was **crystal clear** about it.”



V. BIBLICAL OFFICES.

Luther: “Fifth, the church is recognised externally by the fact that it consecrates or calls ministers, or has offices that it is to administer.”

LOL: Luther recognised that the Bible established office in the church – not the sacral caste of priests – but the minister who faithfully preached the Word and administered the sacraments. Luther’s focus on the simplicity and importance of the congregation came to quite radical expression, for his day, in the belief that in principle the congregation has the right to call its own minister... Ministers were not a mysterious order created and imposed by a hierarchy, but were to emerge from the congregation.”



VI. WORSHIP.

Luther: “Sixth, the holy Christian people are externally recognised by prayer, public praise, and thanksgiving to God. Where you see and hear the Lord’s Prayer prayed and taught; or psalms or other spiritual songs sung, in accordance with the word of God and the true faith; also the creed, the Ten Commandments, and the catechism used in public, you may rest assured that a holy Christian people of God are present.”

LOL: “From the beginning, the Lutheran movement had viewed most forms of worship as *adiaphora*, or “things indifferent.”... Luther himself wanted to give space for pastors to lead their congregations gently toward a service that was shaped by God’s Word.” (p. 242).



VII. SUFFERING.

Luther: “Seventh, the holy Christian people are externally recognised by the possession of the sacred cross. They must endure every misfortune and persecution, all kinds of trials and evil from the devil, the world, and the flesh.’

1 Thessalonians 1:6, “You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message **in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.**” “*the Spirit and the gifts are ours*”



CONCLUSION: Pastor Reid Matthias, 500 years on, what would Luther say? “I wish they would have listened when I said ‘please don’t call yourself Lutheran, but Christian. What is Luther? The teaching is not mine! ... How could it happen that I – poor stinking bag of worms that I am – end up having the children of Christ called by my miserable name? ... Let us get rid of all party names and call ourselves Christians, after Christ, whose teaching we hold’ ... Don’t be too hard on yourself, I say, trying to comfort the reformer. You’ve given such wisdom to the church. ‘Wisdom! Many of these people have much more wisdom than I... Today, then, let us look for what unites, and not what divides ... Without one, strong, ecumenical voice there will be no meaningful Christian impact on the world.’ I nod. ‘It would be a wonderful thing if the denominations of the world could band together under the common banner of what we share as Christians rather than what divides us.’”

In a July 8, 1530 letter to Lazarus Spengler, Luther interprets his seal:

Grace and peace from the Lord. As you desire to know whether my painted seal, which you sent to me, has hit the mark, I shall answer most amiably and tell you my original thoughts and reason about why my seal is a symbol of my theology. The first should be a black cross in a heart, which retains its natural colour, so that I myself would be reminded that faith in the Crucified saves us. "For one who believes from the heart will be justified" (Romans 10:10). Although it is indeed a black cross, which mortifies and which should also cause pain, it leaves the heart in its natural colour. It does not corrupt nature, that is, it does not kill but keeps alive. "The just shall live by faith" (Romans 1:17) but by faith in the crucified. Such a heart should stand in the middle of a white rose, to show that faith gives joy, comfort, and peace. In other words, it places the believer into a white, joyous rose, for this faith does not give peace and joy like the world gives (John 14:27). That is why the rose should be white and not red, for white is the colour of the spirits and the angels (cf. Matthew 28:3; John 20:12). Such a rose should stand in a sky-blue field, symbolizing that such joy in spirit and faith is a beginning of the heavenly future joy, which begins already, but is grasped in hope, not yet revealed. And around this field is a golden ring, symbolizing that such blessedness in Heaven lasts forever and has no end. Such blessedness is exquisite, beyond all joy and goods, just as gold is the most valuable, most precious and best metal. This is my *compendium theologiae* [summary of theology]. I have wanted to show it to you in good friendship, hoping for your appreciation. May Christ, our beloved Lord, be with your spirit until the life hereafter. Amen.