

25 June 2017
Pentecost 3
Presentation of the Augsburg Confession

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Confessing the Truth”

Text: Matthew 10:5a, 21-33 (Jeremiah 20:7-13)

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

John, Duke of Saxony, Elector
George, Margrave of Brandenburg
Ernest, Duke of Lüneberg
Philip, Landgrave of Hesse
John Frederick, Duke of Saxony
Francis, Duke of Lüneberg
Wolfgang, Prince of Anhalt
Senate and Magistracy of Nürnberg
Senate of Reutlingen

Recognize those names? Most of you probably do not. But they are very important people. They are the rulers who signed the Augsburg Confession and presented it to the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, Charles V, on this day, 487 years ago. We're celebrating the 500th anniversary of Luther's posting of the 95 theses this year; the 500th anniversary of the beginning of the Reformation. But that event led to this one - the presentation of the Augsburg Confession, when these princes and cities of the Holy Roman Empire literally put their necks on the line and *confessed*: this is what is taught in our churches.

You see, the Emperor, Charles V, had called for this meeting at Augsburg. He called for this meeting because he wanted to put this silly religious disagreement behind him so he could get on with the important matter of the day: uniting the empire for a military battle against the Turks - or, as you know them better, the Muslims. Their army was on the doorstep of the Empire, hungry for battle, thirsting for blood, and eager for conquest to expand their territory through all of Europe. This silly religious dispute couldn't get in the way - there was too much at stake! So figure it out and let's go fight the *real* battle.

It's not hard to translate that same idea to our day and age. There are those today who would say: stop arguing about theology, stop worrying about silly religious disagreements, about right and wrong, and how one is saved, and by who. That stuff doesn't matter. Let's all just get along and do what's really important. (Whatever you

think it is that is really important. The current issues of today. Whatever battles you think are worth fighting.) That's kind of what the emperor was saying all those years ago.

But those Lutheran princes, cities, people, and theologians heard what Jesus said in the Gospel today, and so had a different opinion of the whole thing. ***Have no fear of them***, Jesus said. The "them" for the disciples were those persecuting them, threatening them, and maligning them. The "them" for those German princes were the Turks, the Emperor, and the Roman Church who were threatening them. ***Have no fear of them***, Jesus said. Do not fear those who rise up against you. ***Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell***. So for those German princes, the truth could not be compromised. God knew what was happening. Their heavenly Father could take care of them. And does.

For look, Jesus continued, at the birds. ***Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of the millions or billions of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father***. Apart from Him seeing it. Apart from Him knowing it. So what about *them*? Well, ***even the hairs of your head are all numbered***. Or in other words, your Father in heaven knows you and your situation and your troubles better than you know yourself! So do not fear. He sees. He knows. He cares. He got this.

Rather, Jesus says, confess. Confess the truth. Do not be afraid to do so. For ***everyone who [confesses] me before men, I also will [confess] before my Father who is in heaven***. The English translation we heard today used the word *acknowledge* there - everyone who *acknowledges* me. That's okay. But confess is better, and more literal. Those German princes were being called to confess, and confess they would. That's why what they presented this day 487 years ago is called the Augsburg *Confession*.

Now, some of you have heard me explain this in Bible class or in catechism instruction - what does that mean? What does it mean to confess? The word there is *homologeō*. *Homo* = the same, and *logeō* = speaking. So, same speaking, or: to say the same thing. And so to confess God, to confess Jesus, is to say the same thing as He says. God speaks, and we respond. God says something, and we say: truth! That is confession.

And that is done in three general ways. God says you are a sinner. And we confess; we say the same thing. We confess our sins. Yes, I am a sinner. Truth.

God tells us who He is - the Holy Trinity, as we celebrated a couple of weeks ago. And we confess; we say the same thing. We confess the creed. Yes, you are Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Truth.

And then God tells us all that He has done and is doing for us poor, miserable sinners; for us and for our salvation. And we confess; we say the same thing. We speak of His wonderful, saving deeds in praise. Yes, you have done it. Your cross, Your water, Your

Body and Blood, Your forgiveness. Truth.

This is the confession those princes made before Emperor Charles V, and it our confession still today. Not because it's our tradition - that would be a mistake. It is our confession still today because it's the truth. This is who God is, who we are, and what He has done for us. This is the truth that matters more than anything else in this world. The truth that leads to eternal life.

Now, some of what they confessed the Roman Church agreed with, some of it they did not. Charles did not get his agreement. But God protected, preserved, and provided for His Church anyway. The God who knows the hairs on your head and the birds that fall can do it. For the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell can *also* save that same soul and body here and now, in this world and life. That's why we need have no fear. Not even of death.

But honestly, that's not what you fear, is it? Most of you sitting here today are not thinking about death - *you fear other things*. Maybe ridicule or dishonor. Maybe losing your job. Maybe suffering or persecution. Maybe what will come before death - disease, weakness, shame, dependency. Maybe you fear what it really means to live out the Christian life, a life of love and giving yourself for others . . . because you really don't want to do that. You have goals and dreams and wants and desires that you usually put first. You don't want to say no to yourself or your children. You fear loneliness, not being liked. You think first of yourself, not others; this life, not the next.

So it is time to confess. 487 years ago those German princes were called to confess, and so are we. But today, not an *Augsburg* Confession. We still confess and believe what they did, yes. But I think our confession, your confession, will be a bit different. Because the issues of today are different. But it will still be a confession of God's Word and truth. In word and deed. So what do we need to confess today?

Well, we confess that sin is sin. That what God says is sin, is sin. The world doesn't want us to do that. The world wants us to accept what they think is right and wrong. Their truth. What they want. But we will confess and live a different truth, though it bring persecution. And we will confess *our* sin.

We confess the value and sanctity of human life - from the very youngest to the very oldest and everywhere in between. We will throw no life away, but love and cherish each man and woman as Jesus did. No matter their mental capacity, physical ability, or inconvenience. We confess all life as a gift from God.

We confess the one true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - and that there is no other God against a world that wants to make all gods and all religions equal. For there are many Charles V's out there who think that any religious disagreement is a silly one. Get

over it and start doing what really matters. But what could matter more than knowing God and the life He has come to give?

And so we also confess Jesus, the only-begotten Son of God - His virgin birth, His perfect life, His death on the cross, resurrection from the dead, and ascension into heaven. That all this matters because it's all for you, so that you too can have life, now and forever. No one else can give you life after death because no one else ever had life after death but Jesus. We confess that He is our only hope.

So when you refuse to go along with the crowd, when you care for someone others think disposable, when you ask for forgiveness, when you forgive, when you stand up for marriage, when you come here and bring your children here and invite others here, when you come and say "Amen!" to Jesus' Body and Blood, when you reach out to the lowest and the least, when you live as if this life is not all there is and the treasures of this world not what to hold onto - in all those ways, *you're confessing*. You're sticking *your* neck out. You're confessing life, your life-giver, and where your life is. You're confessing your Saviour. Maybe not before an Emperor, but that's not where you've been sent; that's not where you've been given to confess. Like Jeremiah and the prophets, like Paul and the other apostles, like those German princes at Augsburg, you confess where you've been sent to confess, to those people around you, and to the issues of the day.

And for that, Jesus says, there may be persecution, there may be hardship. It won't be easy. ***If they have called the master of the house*** - if they have called Jesus - ***Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household***. How much more will they malign you.

But ***have no fear of them***, Jesus says. Have no fear because the one you are confessing is greater than all. The one you are confessing is able to save you from every foe. And not only is able, but has, and will. Or as the prophet Jeremiah put it - who himself was quite a confessor and faced a lot of opposition - ***Sing to the Lord; praise the Lord! For he has delivered the life of the needy from the hand of evildoers***.

And so we sang, as Jeremiah said: *God of Grace and God of Glory . . . Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, for the facing of this hour . . . for the living of these days* (LSB #850). And He does. The wisdom that you need, the faith that you need, the love that you need, the forgiveness that you need, is all here for you. For Jesus is here for you. Come eat His Body and drink His Blood. And the mouth that does will confess. The life that does will love. And the one who does will live, now and forever. That's what Jesus has promised you. And so we confess it. Yes. Truth.

Those German princes didn't think there was going to be 487 more years of life on earth before Jesus came again. But there was, and their names lives on and their Confession continues to make a difference in the lives of so many. And your confession will too. I

don't know if there will be another 487 years after today before Jesus comes again, but however many years are left, your confession will make a difference. You may never know how, or how many lives it will touch down through the generations. Through your children, through the children we will teach in Vacation Bible School this week, through your friends and neighbors, or those people you just meet for a moment. But the Word you speak and live to others, your confession, will bear fruit. And whether or not anybody here on earth remembers your name, *Jesus will*. For when you were baptized, it was written in His book of life. It is engraved on His hands. And as He said, He will confess you before His Father in heaven. He will speak you before His Father in heaven. And what will He speak? What will be His confession? Well, the same word you hear here, now, you will hear spoken there, then. I forgive you. You are mine. Welcome home.

That's a confession to live for. And to die for.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.