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Presentation of the Augsburg Confession

June 25, 2017

Text: Matthew 10:26–33

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

A holy fear of God is a precious gift of the Holy Spirit; one that we should seek through prayer and Biblical meditation. Our Lord Jesus said, “And 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” (vs. 28). The early Church possessed this holy fear, that Spirit-given reverence and deep awe for God who loves and gives magnanimously through His Son. Listen to how the apostolic church is described in Acts 9:31, “So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.” The days of peace mentioned here are those following the bitter persecution of Saul of Tarsus, who later would become the apostle Paul. During those dark days of persecution, they feared God, who could destroy body and soul in hell, more than the persecutors of the Church, who could only kill the body but not the soul.

This year, 2017, we are celebrating various events as we prepare for the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation. The first two commemorations were the birthday and death day of Martin Luther, the great Reformer of the Church. The Lord used Him mightily to restore the saving Gospel of the Lord Jesus to its primary place within the Church.

Today, we commemorate the Presentation of the Augsburg Confession which took place on this day, June 25, 1530. 487 years ago, a most remarkable thing took place that changed the Church forever. Through the grace of the Holy Spirit, bold Christians gave a wondrous confession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. As you will see, they feared the Lord rather than the power and might of man.

It was a troubling time in Europe during the 1520's, the decade leading up the preparation and Presentation of the Augsburg Confession. On October 31, 1517, Martin Luther's posted his 95 Theses against the sale of indulgences. That event sparked what we now call the Protestant Reformation. The visible, institutional church soon began to splinter apart: Lutherans, the Reformed, the Anabaptists, the

Zwinglians, the spirituals and mystics, and other radicals. But the real reformation of the Church was taking place in congregations and pulpits around Europe, in the hearts and minds of Christians who heard once again the Biblical gospel that God the Father loved the world so much that He gave His Son unto death so that every man, woman, and child might be forgiven their sins and be saved unto eternal life.

And there was political trouble. The Muslims were marching militarily against Europe. They were almost to the gates of Vienna when Charles V, Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, summoned a diet in the German city of Augsburg. A diet was an official assembly of the Empire made up of some of the most powerful political and religious men in Europe.

Emperor Charles V was a devoted Roman Catholic. His goal for the diet was to resolve the religious tension between the Lutherans and the Catholics so that they could march together militarily under one banner and meet the Islamic military threat in Vienna. Under his invitation and command, the Lutherans prepared what we now call the Augsburg Confession. It is our chief confession of faith. The Augsburg Confession is the document that states what we Lutherans believe to be true about God, Jesus, sin, forgiveness, eternal life, the sacraments, and a whole host of Biblical topics.

What took place almost five centuries ago was a bold and clear confession of faith in God's Word. Laymen, with their earthly fortunes hanging in the balance, stood united in one purpose: to confess their faith in the truth of the Gospel recorded in Holy Scripture. In the preface to the Augsburg Confession, the Lutherans declared that "this is our confession and that of our people, article by article, as follows."

I would have you see, dear Lutherans, that laymen made this confession of faith. It may have been written by theologians but it was confessed publicly by Christian laymen in a hostile setting. The Augsburg Confession is truly your Confession not only because it's Biblical but also because it's your churchly inheritance handed down from Christian to Christian. Priceless it is.

I mentioned that the setting was hostile. In the days prior to June 25, Emperor Charles V ordered the Lutheran to participate in the forthcoming Corpus Christi festival as a sign of solidarity and submission to his authority. That festival violated the truth of the Gospel and the Lutheran's consciences held captive to God's Word. The Lutherans refused. Charles threatened. Finally, the Margrave George of Brandenburg,

a Lutheran and one of the princes of the Empire, said to Charles V, “His Majesty (Charles V) is lord of our bodies, but not of our souls. Yes, before I would deny my God and his Gospel, I would here kneel before your Imperial Majesty and suffer my head to be cut off!” He had the holy fear of the Lord; the Margrave feared Him who could kill body and soul in hell more than Charles V who could only kill the body.

Dear saints of God, this is our legacy as Lutherans: to love God and His Word more than life itself. For we hold the Biblical conviction that the Lord Jesus is the Savior from sin, death, and the devil. And there is nothing in this life or the life to come that can separate us from His divine love.

In many ways, June 25 rather than October 31, ought to be the day we celebrate the Reformation of the Church and the birthday of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. During the past 487 years, the Evangelical Lutheran Church has been confessing the truth of the Biblical Gospel with remarkable clarity and conviction. That clarity, that conviction that makes us who we are flows out of the document called the Augsburg Confession.

Some might object and say, “Aren’t you placing more trust in a man-made document rather than God’s Word, the Bible?” The answer is no, not at all, and God forbid that we should ever do such a thing. We Lutherans believe that the Bible is God’s Word; the Bible is inspired by the Holy Spirit. Consequently, it is absolutely true and without error. The Bible is our sole standard by which all preaching, teaching, and living are judged. As soon as you say that you believe in the Bible, you must then answer the very next question, “What does the Bible say?” That’s what the Augsburg Confession is for us Lutherans.

The Lord Jesus Himself, in today’s gospel text said, “Everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven” (vs. 32). The Augsburg Confession is our public confession of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Gospel. And we Lutherans also hear our Lord’s warning in the very next verse, “But whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven” (vs. 33). By the grace of the Holy Spirit, we fear, love, and trust in the Lord and will confess and acknowledge Him publicly and privately until our Lord takes us to be with Him in glory.

So, the Augsburg Confession is our confession of faith. This 487 year-old document is what makes us stand out in the churchly crowds of our day. On the one hand, we are

not Roman Catholics or Eastern Orthodox nor, on the other hand, nor are we one of the many groups that make up the Protestant Churches. The Augsburg Confession makes us different from these and other Christian groups. The center of the Augsburg Confession is the doctrine of justification, the Biblical teaching that salvation is a free gift given through Christ alone received by faith alone. Article IV of the AC states this regarding justification, “Our churches teach that people cannot be justified before God by their own strength, merits, or works. People are freely justified for Christ’s sake, through faith, when they believe that they are received into favor 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.”

What makes us Lutherans different from all other Christian churches is that Christ’s gracious work of salvation is the beginning, middle and ending of all theology and confession of faith. Here, we learn who God is and who we are. God loves His fallen creation with an intensity that is incomprehensible. He gives to us His only Son begotten Son. Jesus the Christ is born of a lowly Virgin mother so that He can do what we cannot. His perfect life, saving death and glorious resurrection become ours through faith. Yes, God loves you and me and all creation so much so that He justifies, He forgives and declares righteous all who trust in Jesus Christ. The heart of the Gospel throbs throughout the Augsburg Confession and so, it points us to the very heart of God Himself.

On June 25, 2017, we confess publicly, before heaven and earth, to be Christians who fear, love, and trust in this God above all things. Jesus is our Lord and Savior. May it be said of us in Kimball/Burns, “So the church (in this area) had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.”

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.