

The Festival of the Presentation of the Augsburg Confession
St. John 8:31-36
June 25th, 2022
Sts. Peter and Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, SC
Pastor Jerald Dulas

You Shall Know the Truth

In Nomine Iesu!

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:

O Lord, send out Thy Light and Thy Truth, let them lead us. O Lord, open Thou my lips, that my mouth may show forth Thy praise. O Lord, graciously preserve me, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected. Amen.

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

On October 31st, 1517 Doctor Martin Luther, the Augustinian monk posted 95 theses on the Castle Church door with the hope that the abuses regarding indulgences and other church practices might be debated. Many people look at that last day in October as the high point of the Lutheran Reformation. However, even though that date is an important date, for that is when the Reformation began, the real high point of the Reformation, especially for Lutherans, is today. On this day in 1530—on June 25th, 1530—the Lutheran Church established itself and its teaching. This day became the day that was universally celebrated among the Lutheran Reformers from the beginning. The celebrations on October 31st came at a much later date.

This day, June 25th, the Festival of the Presentation of the Augsburg Confession, became so important for the Lutherans that fifty years after the Presentation of the Augsburg Confession to Emperor Charles V and the Roman delegation they also published the official teachings of the Lutheran Church. That document was known as the Book of Concord. The official German edition of the 1580 Dresden Book of Concord, became the official teaching of the Church of the Reformation. We still have this document for our reading and study. If there is a question about what our doctrine teaches, it is to be found in the Book of Concord.

Therefore, my dear friends, we celebrate today really two important events in the history of the Lutheran Church: the day the Augsburg Confession was first presented, and the day that that document was published along with the three Ecumenical Creeds, the Apology to the Augsburg Confession, the Small and Large Catechisms, the Smalcald Articles including the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope, and the Formula of Concord, which is presented in both a short—Epitome—form and a long—Thorough or Solid—declaration. In this Book of Concord—in the Augsburg Confession and the other symbols of the Lutheran Church—we will find the true and correct exposition of Holy Scripture. These symbols—these confessions—explain what we believe the Holy Bible teaches. Therefore, they are very important for us to read and examine as Lutherans. Their importance for our understanding of what we believe to be the truth of the Word of God should not be forgotten.

Is this not what our Lord + Jesus says in the Gospel reading for this day from the Apostle and Evangelist St. John? “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.” A disciple is one who learns from another. They are students of their teacher. We are the disciples of the Lord + Jesus. We

are His students. We learn from Him whatever He would teach to us. What would our teacher have us learn? He desires that we abide in His Word. Why? Because those who abide in the Word of God, shall know the truth, and the truth shall make us free.

What does it mean to be free? Freedom should not be confused with licentiousness. Freedom is not doing whatever you want, whenever you want. That is what licentiousness is. Our Lord + Jesus tells us what it means to be free, it means to know the truth. The truth is what makes us free. Knowing the truth is what makes us free. Well then, what is truth? The truth is found in the Epistle reading from the Apostle St. Paul to the Churches of Galatia. The truth is that faith justifies. Faith in what? Faith in the works and merits of the Christ; faith in the perfect obedience to the Law of God by the Lord + Jesus, and by His innocent suffering and death upon the tree of the holy cross. Works of the law do not justify; they do not make us right with the Lord God.

This is why this celebration today of the Presentation of the Augsburg Confession is so important for us as Lutherans to celebrate, for on this day in 1530 the Lutherans established the teaching that a person is justified with the Lord God by what he does, thinks, or says; he is not justified by his works. He is justified because he clings in faith the works of the Lord + Jesus, just as St. Paul teaches in His Epistle. But St. Paul is only explaining what the Lord + Jesus had already taught. It is what our Lord teaches in the Gospel reading for today.

Slaves do not abide in the house forever. They are not a part of the family. They must dwell outside the house. Our Lord uses the image of a slave to show us what it means to live according to our works. Those who are obsessed with their keeping of the Law of God—who think that by being a good person they can obtain favor and grace from the Lord God; that they can earn their salvation by their keeping of the Law—are slaves to sin. They are slaves to sin, because they are slaves to the Law. A person who either believes they are saved by how much they keep the Law, and the opposite person, the one who thinks he does not have to keep the Law at all, are both slaves to sin. For they make the Law their source of salvation, either their keeping it or not keeping it. Both of these kinds of people exclude the Christ. There is no truth in them. They do not know the truth. They are not free. They are bound as slaves to the Law.

We are free from sin—we know the truth and the truth sets us free—because we cling in faith to the works and merits of the Christ. It is the Christ who frees us, and not ourselves. It is His works that free us and not our own. It is He that leads us into the truth. He teaches us, His students—His disciples—that to be free must not look at all at ourselves but look only upon the Christ, the Anointed One of the Lord God, Who fulfilled the Law perfectly for us, and suffered and died on the tree of the holy cross to pay the penalty of our sin. He atoned for our sin and the sin of the whole world, so that all those who believe on Him might have everlasting life. It is our faith in Him and His works which make us justified—make us right with the Lord God. This is the truth that the Holy Scriptures teach. And it is the same truth that is exhibited in the Augsburg Confession and the Book of Concord.

The Festival of the Presentation of the Augsburg Confession is the celebration of the real high point of the Lutheran Reformation. As I said before, this day was especially celebrated annually from the very beginning. The custom that the Lutheran Reformers adopted on this day was to read the entire Augsburg Confession from the pulpit as the sermon. I have seen some who have modified this practice to read a summary of the Augsburg Confession on this day, interspersing the reading various articles, or their summary, throughout the Divine Service. It would be very laudable for the Augsburg Confession to be read by us Lutherans on this day. Indeed, the entire Book of Concord should take an important part in our daily devotions. This is why I supply a schedule for us to do this throughout the year. For these symbols explain to us what the Holy Scriptures teach; they explain to us what the truth of the Word of the Lord God is.

Therefore, my dear friends, let us hear the truth of the Word of God, that we are no longer slaves to sin, but are children who are free from the bondage of the Law, because we know the truth, and the truth makes us free. We are those who are justified by faith in the Christ, and not our works. This is what the Augsburg Confession teaches in the Fourth Article, which reads: "Also they teach that men cannot be justified before God by their own strength, merits, or works, but 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, Who, by His death, has made satisfaction for our sins. This faith God imputes for righteousness in His sight. Rom. 3 and 4." May the Lord God Almighty keep us steadfast in His Word and faith until we enter into the eternal heavenly realm to live with Him forever. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Almighty God, be pleased to accompany Thy Word with Thy Holy Spirit and grant that Thy Word would increase faith in us; bring into the Way of Truth all such as have erred; turn the hearts of the unrepentant; and for sake of Thy Name grant succor to all heavy hearts and those who are heavy-laden, that they may through the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ be relieved and preserved so that they succumb not to the temptation of despair but rather that they gain the victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with the Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

The Votum:

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria!