

Sermon - April 23, 2017 - Easter 2

What does it mean to be Lutherans in the 21st. Century?

Acts 5:29–42



Grace and peace from our risen Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

On this second Sunday of Easter, I would like to explore the question of what does it mean to be Lutherans in the 21st. Century?

We do appreciate and hold on to our heritage of being Lutheran, and that is great, that we don't let go of our traditions, our heritage and our legacy.

Unfortunately many are walking away from the Lutheran faith and legacy, for whatever reason, from conflicts in the church to personal choices, not doctrine, but choices.

So what does it mean to be Lutheran in this century? In order for us to answer the questions we need to remember where we came from. We Lutherans are a the product of the Reformation of the Christian Church, we are the ones who walk in the steps of Martin Luther in keeping with the values, the legacy of Christ, with what Christ intended for his church. Luther's purpose was to bring back the church to what Christ intended, through the work and directions of the Apostles, the first pastors of the Church.

Also, to answer the question we need to remember what Luther had to go through in order for the Reformation would take place.

Luther was a doer! In 1505, young Martin Luther entered the monastery. Within three years, he was ordained a priest. Soon after, Luther was sent on a trip to Rome, where he was sickened by the moral corruption there. In 1512, Luther received a doctorate in theology and was appointed professor of Holy Scripture at Wittenberg.

Luther spent long hours studying the Psalms, Romans, Hebrews, and Galatians. The more he studied the Word of God, the more he could not agree with the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. Specifically, Luther disagreed with the teaching that man plays a role in accomplishing his own salvation through good works. Neither could he agree that the pope had the authority to forgive sins through the selling of indulgences.

On October 31, 1517, Luther posted his Ninety-Five Theses. They were written in Latin his purpose was academic debate. However, they were soon translated into German and distributed across the country. Immediately, Luther was called a heretic by friars and priests throughout the land. Many cried out for his public execution. Maximilian I, the Roman Emperor; Charles V, later Roman Emperor and King of Spain; and Pope Leo X all demanded that Luther be silenced.

What Luther was and still is through his teaching, he was and is a witness of the Gospel. So being a Lutheran in the 21st century means being a witness too. We claim to be Lutherans? Then we ought to know that we also claim to be witness.

The Scripture readings we heard a few minutes ago, remind that Christians are God's witnesses, sent into the world, we claim we are Christians, then we also claim

that we are witnesses. It was true for the first disciples. It was true for Luther almost five hundred years ago. It is true for you and me today. Regardless of the opposition of our society or dangers of our surroundings, we obey God rather than men. Regardless of what we think we should be, or what we should be doing instead, we are witness and must act like one, declaring that salvation is given as a gift to those who believe in Christ Jesus, the crucified and risen Savior.

I. God commands the apostles, Luther, you, to go as Christ was sent.

Back in his day, Luther was summoned to Augsburg to meet with his cardinal. Cajetan showed Luther a papal bull written by Leo X. It announced the pope's right to sell indulgences for forgiveness of sins. Also, it declared that faith was not necessary for one who receives the Sacrament. Luther responded that popes and councils have erred and even contradicted one another. They should be obeyed only when their pronouncements conform with Scripture.

In today's Gospel, John tells how Jesus met with his disciples in the Upper Room. Jesus showed them his wounds and greeted them with God's peace. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Then, Jesus gave them a simple command, "As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you" (v 21). Jesus breathed on them, blessing them with the Holy Spirit.

In the Acts of the Apostles, we catch a glimpse of the disciples doing what Jesus had commanded. Peter and the disciples had been teaching and preaching in the temple. They were brought by guards before the Sanhedrin and told that they must not preach about Jesus anymore. But Peter and the disciples refused to obey the Jewish Council. Even though they were standing before the religious, political, and judicial rulers of their day, the disciples openly declared that they would obey God rather than men.

The disciples witnessed to the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. They named Jesus the source of life and author of salvation. God had made the disciples to be witnesses for Jesus Christ and so had the Holy Spirit, who now lived within them!

II. That means speaking both his Law and his Gospel.

It is extremely important to take note of the message that the disciples proclaimed. It was both Law and Gospel. Remember what the **Law** is, everything God expects us to do or not do, and the **Gospel** everything God does for us through Jesus Christ.

In this case, the disciples proclaimed, declared what wonderful things Jesus had done, that's the **Gospel**, and in the **law** they declared what terrible things the Sanhedrin, the religious leadership had done. The disciples confronted the Jewish council with the reality of their sin before God.

"The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree" (v 30). They said. With these words, the disciples confronted the Sanhedrin with the truth that they had opposed God. They had rejected God's Messiah by humiliating and murdering him. This was their personal sin against God and the Scripture.

But they also proclaimed the truth of God's wondrous Gospel that was now being offered to each man of the Sanhedrin. God had exalted Jesus to his right hand and made Jesus the Author and Savior of life.

The words of the disciples were a direct appeal to the Sanhedrin to repent and have faith in Christ, for the forgiveness of their sins and the gift of eternal life. The Holy

Spirit inspired the disciples to speak, and the Holy Spirit empowered the Word of God to be effective.

The Bible doesn't record what happened in the hearts of the councilmen. But we know Gamaliel immediately spoke on behalf of the disciples. Also, we know that later, some Pharisees and some of the Sanhedrin became Christians.

As you see, what the disciples did there is what we would call evangelism, witnessing, sharing the faith. But as you see they had to speak, they had to speak, they have to tell of the works of Christ. It wasn't a worship service they held and let others speak, but they themselves spoke, they witnessed their faith outside of a Church Service. What does it mean to be a Lutheran in the 21st Century? It means we speak the Gospel, in and out of season, as the apostle Paul tells us (2 Timothy 4:2), and in all circumstances, that we are not shy but take any and every opportunity to speak the Gospel.

III. This we do, with the apostles and Luther, rejoicing that we are counted worthy to suffer for Jesus' name.

This we do, with the apostles and Luther, rejoicing that we are counted worthy to suffer for Jesus' name.

As you have it, in the months after facing Cajetan, Luther would work at an intense pace. He continued teaching and preaching, researching and writing, publishing and debating. The volume of material he produced is astonishing. By 1520, he was on record as disputing the infallibility of the pope, attacking Rome's theology of the sacraments, and defining his position on justification and good works. Leo X answered by condemning Luther as a heretic and issuing a bull of excommunication. Luther's response was to burn the papal bull. In 1521, Luther was summoned to appear before the Diet of Worms. Ordered to recant, he would not. Within days, the emperor declared him an outlaw and heretic, thus permitting anyone in Germany to kill him.

Luther was to be martyred! By God's grace, he was not killed. He lived to be sixty-two years of age. Of course, he did not know that he would live that long. What he knew was that powerful forces were arrayed against him, seeking to silence him. So, why didn't Luther just stop? Why didn't he quit speaking and writing and teaching and preaching? Why didn't he move to some quiet place where no one could find him, and just keep quiet?

Before the Council dismissed the disciples, they were flogged. They were ordered not to speak about Jesus anymore. But the disciples were not discouraged; just the opposite. They left "rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name" (v 41). They were honored to be dishonored for the name of Jesus. Instead of ceasing their witness, they never stopped teaching and preaching Jesus. Every single day they witnessed, in public, in the temple, and in private, from house to house.

We are witnesses. We've looked at the witness of Martin Luther and the testimony of the apostles. These are our examples; this is our heritage. Like them, we have been called by Christ and inspired by the Spirit to be witnesses. We have been sent into our world, our culture, our time. Sure, we might not be like Luther in all respects, but we can certainly be like the first disciples, members of the community at large, nothing special about them, yet Jesus called them to be his disciples, training them to be the leaders of the newly formed church, for we too have called to be

witnesses here and now. We have been called to share with others the beauties of God's gospel.

Yes, we must confess that we do not witness as forthrightly as we should. We can be daunted by the opposing words or condemning actions of those who don't believe in Christ. Or simply, we use excuses because we don't know how to proceed at times, so we can be tempted--we have been tempted to remain silent or inactive.

But we will not be silent. Even though we may receive rejection or dishonor, we will obey God rather than men. We will proclaim salvation as a gift through the crucified and risen Savior, Jesus Christ. We are his witnesses!

So what does it mean being a Lutheran in the 21st, Century? It means we are witness of the miracle of the resurrection, we are witnesses of what God does through Jesus Christ, as we have been blessed with our baptisms, as we are blessed with the gifts of his body and blood, and as we are blessed with the Holy Spirit who will help us to open our mouths as we give testimony, as we give witness, for that is what we are witness, witnesses who will be not be quiet, no matter what!

In the name of the Father and of the Son!

Amen.