

Sunday, March 29, 2020
Faith Lutheran Church
Marion, Iowa
Pastor John Albertson



Pastor's Class -- The confessions

Best wishes to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Luther wrote the Small Catechism for such times as these. People were struggling with what to believe in the midst of world events that were unsettling. He wrote the catechism as a way **to put the faith into practice and to teach children** about the God who comes in Jesus Christ to save.

What are the confessions? A confession means a statement or declaration in the same sense as the recital of the Creed in the worship service.

These confessions have shaped much of the way of life as Lutherans—the way Lutherans are baptized and confirmed, the way they work together with others in their congregation, the kind of preaching they hear.

They are the lens in which we see scripture.

Using materials from the book "Roots of our Faith" Luther's Small Catechism, Book of Concord and other sources I offer the following.

The church of Luther's day taught the Gospel as a **conditional promise**. He was told that God saves those who really want to be saved and who show it in their lives.

Luther punished himself with questions like, “Do I really want to be saved”? “Maybe I only think I want to be saved. “Maybe what I really want is to avoid punishment—and don’t really love God at all.”

He also worried about whether his life showed his sincerity. He was fiercely faithful to the requirements of the monastery—but still he wondered, “Do I do good things because I really want to or am I just putting on a show?” “When can I be certain that I’ve done enough?”

In his struggle Luther continued to read the Bible. As he did, he began to hear the gospel in a new way. Now he heard the Bible say “God saves those God wants to save.”

As to works the Bible says, “God shows God’s love through the lives of those he saves, making new people out of them.

As he read, Luther realized that the gospel is not conditional but is an **unconditional promise** which God makes to all people.

Here are some examples: Lo I am with you always...There is nothing that can separate us from the love of Christ...I go to prepare a place for you... I have called you by name you are mine...

There is no condition in these promises.

Why are confessions necessary? We need tools to help us understand our faith. And we need creeds and confessions to live our lives together under the sure and certain promises. The Confessions are statements of faith handed down,

confessed by the church for some 500 years, given testimony to the scriptures as the Word of God.

Luther begins with The Ten Commandments and their explanations. These explanations of the Commandments are found in the Augsburg Confession in the Small and Large Catechisms.

Article 2: “It is also taught among us that since the fall of Adam all people who are born according to the course of nature are conceived and born in sin. That is, all people are full of evil lust and inclinations from their mother’s wombs and are unable by nature to have true fear of God and true faith in God. Moreover, this inborn sickness and hereditary sin is truly sin and condemns to the eternal wrath of God all those who are not born again through Baptism and the Holy Spirit.”

Article 18: Freedom of the Will. It is also taught among us that humans possess some measure of freedom of the will which enables them to live an outwardly honorable life and to make choices among the things that reason comprehends. **But without grace, help, and activity of the Holy Spirit humans are not capable of making themselves acceptable to God, of fearing God and believing in God with their whole heart, or of expelling inborn evil lusts from the heart.** This is accomplished by the Holy Spirit, who is given through the Word of God...

Augustine on free will: “We concede that all people have a free will...However, this **does not enable them to act in matters pertaining to God** (such as loving God with their whole heart or fearing God), for it is only in the outward acts of this life that they have freedom to choose good or evil. By good I mean what they are capable of by nature: whether or not to eat or drink or visit a friend, whether

to dress or undress, whether to build a house, engage in a trade...By evil as when kneeling before an idol, committing murder, etc.”

The confessions say that we have **“free will in what reason can comprehend.”**

That is, we have some choice in matters that we can understand and control. **But we do not have any choice about God. God is above us—God does the choosing,** not us. And God chooses us, God goes to work on us so we will come to fear, love, and trust him.

“You shall...” “You shall not...” If the Commandments had fingers, there isn’t much doubt about where they would point: they would single out each one of us.

Yet, one commandment in this parade of shall's and shall not's different from all the rest. It sticks out like a rose among thorns: **“I am the Lord your God. You shall have no other gods before me.”**

These words are the **unconditional promise of the Gospel.** God promises to be our God—with no strings attached. This is the promise of the First Commandment.—that God will be our God. As our God, he will give us all that he has to give, including life, forgiveness, and resurrection from the grave.

As Luther says in the Large Catechism, it is as if God says, **“Whatever good thing you lack, look to me for it and seek it from me, and whenever you suffer misfortune and distress, come and cling to me and no one else.”**

It is the clinging that is the problem. For there is something in each of us that doesn’t want to believe this promise. In fact, **we can’t believe it. (3rd Article)** So, instead of taking God at his word—fearing, loving, and trusting God above all

things—we turn to ourselves, to other people or other things in the hope that somehow we can take care of ourselves.

Attaching conditions: Because we can't believe this promise, we try continually to attach conditions to it. We interpret the First Commandment like this: "I will be the Lord your God if you give your life to me," or "I will be your God if you allow me to be."

In pride, we fear, love, or trust ourselves to fulfill the condition we've attached to the promise. In despair, we fear, love, or trust no one, sure that the condition can't be fulfilled.

Luther said, "**Whatever we place our trust in the most is our God.**" Money, food, 57 Chevy. Left to ourselves, we are incurable idolaters. We don't not choose to become idolaters—we are idolaters, moving from one god to the other. And we cannot choose not to be idolaters. **We are trapped.** This is why the unconditional promise of the gospel is so desperately important. In Christ he says to each of us, "**I am the Lord your God**"—**no strings attached.** And with this word, he promises to deliver us from sin—to make new people out of us and to raise us from the dead.

God has the action—always! "I am the Lord your God."

The first three commandments all speak of our relationship with God. As the Lutheran confessions read them, the First Commandment is by far the most important. In it God makes the promise that, in Christ, begins a new relationship with him. Having made us his, he wants to make sure that we know his name and hear his word.

The remaining commandments all speak of our **relationship with other people**.
In each of them, God protects something essential.

4th: “Honor your Father and Mother.

5th: You shall not kill.

6th: You shall not commit adultery.

7th: You shall not steal.

8th: You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

9th: You shall not covet your neighbor’s house.

10th: You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his manservant, or his maid-servant, or his cattle, or anything that is your neighbor’s.

God didn’t give any of the commandments as a way for us to demonstrate that we love him. He gave all of them because he loves us and wishes to bring some peace, order, and justice to daily life. He also uses them to drive us to his promise, so that seeing our sinful condition, we will cry out to him for help.

Next session: Apostles Creed.