

*“Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. <sup>33</sup> But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven.*

<sup>34</sup> *“Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. <sup>35</sup> For I have come to turn*

*“ ‘a man against his father,  
a daughter against her mother,  
a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—  
<sup>36</sup> a man’s enemies will be the members of his own household.’*

<sup>37</sup> *“Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; <sup>38</sup> and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. <sup>39</sup> Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. (Matthew 10:32-39)*

### **Why Run the Risk of Confessing Christ?**

You might have heard some place that this year is the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the start of the Lutheran Reformation. On October 31, 1517, Martin Luther nailed the 95 Theses to the castle church door in Wittenberg and that event set off a theological tidal wave. Well, today, we’re commemorating another event in that tidal wave, an event that cemented the position of the Lutheran Church: the presentation of the Augsburg Confession, which happened on this day in 1530. The Emperor Charles V had summoned a diet of the Holy Roman Empire in the German city of Augsburg. A diet didn’t have anything to do with losing weight. It was a meeting of the princes, the great nobles, of the Empire. The emperor had promised that he would let the Lutherans explain their faith at that meeting, so one of Luther’s fellow professors, Philip Melancthon wrote the Augsburg Confession.

Crowds of people filled the streets of Augsburg in anticipation. Most of whom were pro-Lutheran and wanted to hear the Confession. So when the time came for the Lutherans to read it, Charles moved the meeting to a much smaller venue to keep people from hearing it. But it was unusually hot that summer and, of course, they had no air conditioning, so they had to open the windows. The Lutherans had a man named Christian Beyer, read the confession. He was famous for his loud and clear voice. The crowds gathered outside the windows and hung on his words. The emperor made a point of going to sleep on his throne while the confession was read. But even most of the Catholic opponents had to admit that the confession was a masterful presentation of our teaching.

But presenting it was a dangerous thing to do. Charles would later go to war to try to stamp out the Lutheran heresy. He considered the Lutherans to be traitors. Martin Luther himself was under a death sentence and could not come to the diet. The meeting was not a church council. It was a political gathering. The Confession was written by a professor, but it was signed by laymen, by princes and mayors and city councilmen who knew that they could lose everything, even their lives, by opposing the emperor and declaring their Lutheran faith publicly. But they signed it anyway. Why did they make this confession? And why do we do the same thing almost 500 years later, in situation after situation when we could pay a heavy price? **Why run the risk of confessing Christ?**

#### **I.**

Make no mistake, confessing Christ is what the Augsburg Confession is all about. It’s about clearly teaching the gospel so that people like you and me can know that our sins are forgiven and that we will live with Jesus in heaven. In our gospel lesson for today, Jesus urges us all to make the very kind of confession that the Lutheran princes made in Augsburg. Why does he tell us to do that? **Why run the risk of confessing Christ? Because it makes us one.**

Ten years ago this month, when I was installed as your pastor, I stood up here and I swore to you that I would make all my teaching and preaching conform to the Lutheran Confessions, including the Augsburg Confession. This afternoon, a new pastor will be ordained and installed at St. John’s in Westland and he’ll

swear the exact same oath. We have our pastors do that because we don't want to compromise our Lutheran beliefs any more than our theological ancestors were willing to do in Augsburg in 1530. We stand together around those teachings.

But we aren't just concerned about standing together with each other. We want to stand with Christ. Jesus said, **"Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven."** The Greek words that Jesus used can be translated as "Whoever *confesses* me before me ..." and "Whoever *denies* me before men." If we confess Jesus clearly to the world, Jesus confesses us to his Father in heaven. What does that mean? It means that he will confess that we are his children, we are those who trusted in him and God the Father should let us in to heaven. But if we deny Jesus here on earth because it's painful to endure difficulties and ridicule, if we allow the cares and concerns of this life to silence our confession, Jesus will deny us before his Father in heaven. He'll deny that we ever really had faith. He'll condemn us to hell.

Then Jesus says, **"Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword."** He goes on to talk about fathers and sons and mothers and daughters being divided against each other. What does he mean? The gospel, the good news about Jesus Christ, divides people. It even breaks up families and ruins relationships. Does that surprise you? Why does it work that way? The answer is sin. God gives us the only message that gives eternal life. If a husband hears that message and believes it, but his wife rejects it, she is separating herself from Christ and eternal life. Finally, she is separating herself from her husband who will live with Christ forever. In this life, she has built a wall between herself and her husband and all those who live in the hope of heaven. You can often see that separation in that person's attitude toward us and our faith.

While not being a Lutheran doesn't keep you out of heaven, not being a Christian does. Since the Augsburg Confession – indeed all Lutheran teaching and practice – is designed to confess Christ, we do believe that when other Christians reject a part of our confession, they are separating themselves from us here, just like the Emperor separated himself from the Lutherans of his day. In the end, that kind of rejection can – and I stress the word *can* – destroy that person's faith. By separating themselves from what the Bible teaches, they can do so much damage to their faith that it dies.

But to put the focus back on us, are we willing to confess Christ? It can be risky today in many ways. It does divide us from the world around us. It can cost us friendships that we treasure and opportunities that we wanted to pursue. So why do it? Because that confession makes us one with Christ. Now, obviously, if a person doesn't really mean it – if they're just confessing faith in Christ because they want to get married and their spouse really wants them to join the church, so they do it but don't believe what they're saying, that false confession does not unite that unbeliever to Christ. But confessing Jesus as Lord and Savior, as the Son of God who came to live and die and rise so that we will live with him forever, that does make us one with Christ. It gives us all the benefits of being his children. And it makes us one with all Christians everywhere. When we get to heaven, there will be no false doctrine. There will be nothing to divide God's people. There won't even be any hurt feelings. We will finally be one the way God always intended us to be. When we have faith in Christ here, we have already joined that oneness. Spiritually, we are already united with all true believers, even if we can't physically unite with everyone yet. Because we are one with Jesus. That is what we absolutely want to be.

## II.

But that is not to say there won't be a cost to making that confession. Jesus says that there will be. But he still calls us to confess him, not just with our words, but with our lives. He calls us to love him more than we love anyone or anything of this life. That's a big challenge for us. Why do it? **Why run the risk of confessing Christ? Because it's worth it.**

Now, the Lutheran princes really were risking their lives to confess Christ. That may not be as great a threat for us. But Jesus didn't start there. He started with our families. After pointing out that confessing him can divide families, he went on to say, **"Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."** This is where we begin to see the cost. What will it mean to make a clear confession of Christ? If you come from a family of unbelievers, they may shake their heads at your new found faith and wonder what happened to you. They may ridicule you and exclude you. If you leave the church of your youth because you believe we have the gospel in

a more pure form here, it may cause all kinds of ugly comments and difficult situations. If your family wants to commune here when your kids are confirmed and they can't, they might make quite a scene. If your family disagrees with some of what God says, even if they're members here, they might put you into a very difficult position. What do you say to that sister or brother who's getting a divorce for an unscriptural reason? What do you say to that parent or grandparent who tells you, "Just don't tell the pastor,?" What do you do when they try to make you choose between your confession and your relationship with them?

We can pay a tremendous cost here. But when we know what God says and someone pulls us away from that confession, it's a sin to go with them. It is finally a denial of Christ. How so? Your god is the thing you put first in your life. It's the thing you care the most about and that you dedicate the most to. It's the thing you trust in and value above all else. When you put other people's opinions or desires ahead of what you know Christ tells you, you have just made them a god in Jesus' place. That's idol worship.

It can happen in other ways, too. Jesus tells us that if we're not willing to take up our cross and follow him, we're not worthy of him. Confessing Christ in a sinful world is going to make people mad. It's going to lead to conflict and personal attacks. When we care too much about our own comfort to risk that, again, we have created a false god: ourselves. Jesus hits that point even harder when he says, **"Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."** Now that's a cryptic saying. What does it mean? Just this: if you dedicate all your time and effort to having a nice life here, you will lose eternal life, because you've made yourself and your comfort and wealth and popularity your god. But if you put Christ first and sacrifice whatever you have to in order to be faithful to him, if you are willing to lose jobs and friends and even loved ones instead of losing Jesus, you will have eternal life. Your faith will endure to the end.

So where are we? Can any of us claim that we always put Jesus ahead of everything? That we value eternal life above money and comfort and popularity all the time? I once had a family that had always been very faithful in coming to the church I served. Their daughter even babysat our kids. But when the wife just decided she didn't love her husband anymore and divorced him, she forced me to take church discipline against her. Her mother, whose husband I had served as a shut in and buried, told me, "I can't go against my family. I can't be part of a church that would kick them out." She loved her daughter more than the Lord who was calling that daughter to repent. How many of us would've said the exact same thing? Our sinful hearts embrace idols over and over again.

But Jesus died and paid for us and our idol worship. Jesus died and paid because we love family and money and our personal comfort more than we love the Lord. Jesus died and he swept all that sin away. And then Jesus rose to tell us we are forgiven. You, my friends, are forgiven for every moment of idol worship that you've ever been guilty of. You are forgiven fully and freely and without limit. You are forgiven and Jesus will bring you to heaven when you die and he will raise your body from the dead and you will live with him at last in world where it's easy to confess him and natural to be one with him. You will live in a world where nothing will ever pull us away from him or from each other, because, at long last, our faith and our hearts will be perfect.

All that is Christ's gift to you. It's why we confess him. It's what gives us the faith that embraces and confesses him. It's what makes us one with Jesus and one with each other. It's what makes it worth it to risk everything to confess our Lord. Our Lutheran forefathers understood that and made a good confession. They left that confession to us. That confession is the gospel of Jesus Christ. Embrace that gospel. Confess that gospel. Risk everything in this life for that gospel, because Jesus will more than restore it when he brings you home. Amen.