

The Beginnings of the Lutheran Church

By Vicar Jake Zabel

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, Amen.

Sermon text: 1 Peter 3:13-17

Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honour Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defence to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behaviour in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.

Lord sanctify us by your truth, your Word is truth. Amen.

The start of the Lutheran Reformation is marked by the events of the night of October 31st 1517, when Luther nailed his 95 *Theses* to the door of the Wittenberg church. However, the denomination which we commonly call today the Lutheran Church would not yet exist until 1530.

On June 25th 1530, Philip Melanchthon presented the *Augsburg Confession* to the Diet of Augsburg. In this single, simple act the Evangelical Reformers (or Evangelical Catholics as they called themselves) gave an official public defence for the hope that was in them. In this act the Reformers defined who they were, what they believed, what they rejected and what separated them from the Papists (or Roman Catholics). By presenting this document to the Emperor, the Reformers publically and doctrinally separated themselves from Rome and the Pope. It was from this moment that the denomination that we now call the Lutheran Church began.

St. Peter tells us that we must always be prepared to make a defence. Yet we are to do it with gentleness and respect, so that when we are slandered, those who revile our good behaviour may be put to shame. As Christians we are to suffer for doing good, for “blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you on account of the LORD.

Rejoice and be glad for your reward in heaven is great.” (Matthew 5:11-12)
But woe to you who suffer for doing evil, for those who suffer for doing evil
have justly earned the punishment for their wickedness.

Christ declared that He came not to bring peace but a sword (Matt. 10:34), this sword is His Word (Eph. 6:17) which is the truth (John 17:17). The truth divides, separates truth from error, right doctrine from false doctrine, good from evil. Those who speak the truth will cause division, and the world will hate those who speak the truth of God’s Word. For just as the world hated Jesus so too it will hate His followers (John 15:18-20), if they keep His Word, then they will keep our word (v20), but those who hate the Lord will hate us also (v18-19).

We must not be afraid to speak the truth, we are to have no fear, nor be troubled, but in our hearts honour Christ the Lord as holy, even if it brings division and causes offence. However, we are not to cause unnecessary offence, but are to give a defence in gentleness and with all due respect. When Martin Luther nailed his *95 Theses* on the church door, he did not do so as a protest or to stir up controversy. Luther’s *95 Theses* were not written in German, that the commoners could read it (at least not at first); instead they were in Latin, the theological language. Luther did not seek controversy or division but simply to discuss and debate the theology and practice of the Catholic Church of his day.

Luther repeatedly called for a Church Council in order to properly discuss and debate the matters of his day. Luther did not seek to create chaos and division. He did not seek to divide the Church but simply to reform it.

Following Luther’s excommunication from the Church in 1521 at the Diet of Worms, the Evangelical Reformers continued to push for a Church Council. They Lutherans, sought to reform the Church, not break it. They desired to discuss matters with the Papists in a respectful, formal, official way.

The Lutherans were not Radical Reformers like Karlstadt or Zwingli, or the Anabaptists or the Enthusiasts (16th Century Pentecostals). The Radical Reformers sought reform through violence and force, such as the Wittenberg Riots of 1522 when Karlstadt and followers torn down the Saint statues, crucifixes, Church art work, and mocked Holy Water.

The Radical Reformers sought to become Anti-Rome, and began to reject the Sacraments, the Office of the Ministry and in some cases even the Trinity because these were “Roman Catholic” doctrines.

All of this upheaval and violence led to three separate, but related, Diets. The first two were the two Diets of Speyer, which sought to relieve tension in the Holy Roman Empire but instead created more. The first Diet of Speyer of 1526 was called in order to deal with the matter of the divided Empire which had been split by the Reformation. At this Diet the Lutheran princes won the right to practice Lutheran theology in their lands. The rule “his region, his religion” was adopted meaning that each prince would declare a state religion for their region. However, in 1529 at the Second Diet of Speyer the loyal Papist princes overturned the decision. Thus forcing all Lutheran princes to renounce the Lutheran teachings, to devote themselves to the Pope and to hand over or kill all those who did not submit to the Pope. The Lutheran princes protested the decision, and became labelled as Protestant (thus the origins of the term). This conflict between the Papist and Lutheran princes threatened to split the Empire.

While the princes argued politics, the Reformers argued theology and continued to push for a Council. The Papists continued to refuse. But come 1530 the Lutherans would get their chance to give a defence for the hope that was in them.

In 1529 the Turks (Muslims), had marched against the gates of Vienna, prompting the Emperor to call a third Diet to try and unite his Empire, the Diet of Augsburg. Finally, the Emperor sought to bring an end to the theological disputes. At this Diet the two groups, the Roman Catholics and the Evangelical Catholics (Lutherans) were to come and discuss and debate theology. The Lutherans had prepared their defence, originally a paper called the *Torgau Articles* prepared by Luther, Melancthon and their colleagues Johan Bugenhagen and Justus Jonas, which dealt solely with the abuses and errors of the Papists. However, in the lead up to the Diet of Augsburg, the Papist theologian, John Eck, wrote his *Four Hundred and Four Articles for the Diet of Augsburg* in which he attacked the Lutherans and accused them of numerous heresies. In this writing the Lutherans had been lumped together with the other Radical Reformers and accused of denying the Trinity, Two

Natures of Christ, the Office of the Ministry, the Sacraments and many other foundational doctrines.

Thus came the time for the Lutherans to prepare a thorough defence, one that not only addressed the abuses of the Papacy, but one that also responded to the errors of the other protestant groups.

For this task Philip Melanchthon was chosen to write a defence, which would be done in all gentleness and respect, so that those who reviled the Reformer, such as Eck, would be put to shame.

Luther used very colourful and offensive language and was not the best at giving a defence in gentleness and with respect. Luther admitted this in his famous “Here I stand speech” at the Diet of Worms. As he said, “I confess that I may have attacked such persons [Papists] with more violence than was consistent with my profession as an ecclesiastic; I do not think of myself as a saint.” Luther publically confessed that he was much too violent and aggressive in his writings, for this reason Philip Melanchthon was chosen to put together the *Augsburg Confession*.

Melanchthon was much more gentle and respectful in his approach to the Roman Church, as Luther once said “Melanchthon is like a pin, that pricks and annoys, but I am like a spear which is used to kill boars.”

For the case of the Diet of Augsburg the Reformers needed a gentle, diplomatic, wise man like Melanchthon. On May 15th 1530, prior to the present of the *Augsburg Confession* Luther wrote to Elector John the Steadfast, the current prince of Saxony concerning the confession. He wrote, “it really does please me, and I do not know anything that can be improved or changed, and I would not attempt it anyway, for I cannot step so softly and quietly as he [Melanchthon].”

Melanchthon prepared a wonderful defence, it was Biblical and accurate, none could justly accuse him of promoting error, and it was well written in a soft and gentle spirit, none could accuse him of wrong doing. Yet still the Catholics refused it, and wrote a Confutation against it.

This prompted Melanchthon to prepare an *Apology [Defence] of the Augsburg Confession*.

On September 22nd 1530 Emperor Charles read a draft document of the *Edict of Augsburg*. By this time Melanchthon had completed the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession*. The Saxon chancellor attempted to present a draft to the

Emperor, but just as the Emperor reached for the document his brother King Ferdinand of Austria whispered in his ear and he withdrew his hand refusing the document. By refusing the document the Emperor consolidated his stance with the Papists and all dialogue between the Catholics and Lutherans was severed.

At the close of the Diet of Augsburg on November 19th 1530 Emperor Charles V enacted the *Edict of Augsburg*. The edict declared that the Lutheran princes had until April 15th 1531 to return to the Roman Catholic faith, to outlaw all evangelical preaching, to burn all the Protestant writings and hand over any evangelical preachers.

The Lutheran Reformers, failed to reform the Catholic Church, but they held firm to God's Word, defending it in all truth, and they did so in gentleness and with respect. The Reformers have given us the best example of how we are to defend the faith in gentleness and respect.

On September 15th 1530, Luther wrote to the Reformers commending them on their behaviour, "You have confessed Christ, offered peace, obeyed the Emperor, endured reproach, been saturated with slander, and have not recompensed evil for evil; in summary, you have performed the holy work of God...I shall canonize you as faithful members of Christ."

When we give a defence for the faith we shall do it in gentleness and with respect so that none may accuse us of doing wicked. For woe be to those who persecute us and revile us when we have done what is right and good, for they shall be put to shame.

In this day and age, many accuse us of speaking "hate-speech" when we speak God's truth. Call homosexuality a sin and they accuse you of homophobia, reject Women's Ordination or teach that wives are to be subordinate to their husbands and they accuse you of being a sexist. Promote the historical, Lutheran and Biblical practice of Closed Communion and they accuse you of being hateful and divisive.

When we do what is right and good and preach the true Word of the LORD, we will be persecuted. But when we are persecuted for righteousness' sake we shall be blessed. (Matt. 5:10)

But those who revile us when we do what is good will be put to shame (1 Pet. 3:16), for the one who rejects us rejects Christ and the one who rejects Christ rejects the Lord (Luke 10:16).

Therefore, we shall not fear those who revile us for doing good, who despise us for preaching the truth. Instead, we are to clothes ourselves in the Armour of God (Eph. 6:10-11) and stand firm upon His Word, being prepared to make a defence for the hope that is in us.

In regards to the *Augsburg Confession* Luther once wrote, “if they reject it, I see nothing that might be yielded... As I have always written – I am prepared to yield everything to them if we are but given the freedom to teach the Gospel. I cannot yield anything that militates against the Gospel.”

The Gospel is the hope that is in us, that we are to be prepared to defend. The Gospel is this, that we are justified by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone (*Augsburg Confession*, Art. IV.3).

Luther said, “Justification is the article upon which the Church stands or fall.”

In the *Smalcald Articles* Luther wrote that, “the first and chief article is that Jesus Christ, our God and Lord, ‘was handed over to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification’... Nothing in this article can be conceded or given up, even if heaven and earth or whatever else exists were to pass away...on this article stands all that we teach and practice.” (SA Part II.1.1.5)

This is the hope that is in us, that Jesus our God and our Lord, died for our sake. He alone is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29), upon Him was laid the iniquity of us all (Isa. 53:6). We are saved not by our works but we are justified on the basis of sheer grace, because of the sole merit, the entire obedience, and the bitter suffering, death and resurrection of our Lord Christ alone, whose obedience is reckoned to us as righteousness (*Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration*, Art. III.9). For we are justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as propitiation by his blood, to be received in faith (Rom. 3:24-25).

The hope that is in us, is justification by grace through faith in Christ, for through Him we have obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God (Rom. 5:2).

Christ died to take away your sins, and on the Third Day He rose again for your justification. Through Him alone is our salvation, there is no other way to Heaven than that which has been freely given in Christ (John 14:6, Acts 4:12). Therefore, who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? For if God is for us, who can be against us? (Rom. 8:31) For to live is Christ and to die is gain. (Phil. 1:21)

But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. For blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of God. (Matt. 5:10)

Have no fear of them, nor be troubled. For we are not to fear those who can harm only the body but cannot kill the soul, instead we shall fear God alone. (Matt. 10:28, Luke 12:4-5) For nothing can separate us from the love of God which we have obtained in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 8:37-39)

Therefore, in your hearts honour Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defence to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you. Amen.

Peace to all of you who are in Christ. Amen. (1 Peter 5:14)

PRAYER FOR THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, we praise You for creating all things by Your power, and for sustaining the earth and all who live on it. Let us never forget Your witness to Yourself in Your creation.

Father, we praise You for revealing Yourself to us in Your Word, and for showing us Your holy will. We thank You for the inspired writers of Your wise and true Word, for through them You have shown us Your forgiving love and given us rich promises that give us hope. We praise You for Your grace in Christ Jesus, by which You have provided us our escape from Your judgment on our disobedience. Pour out Your Spirit on us so that we may grow in knowing You.

We praise You for leading us from death to life through the sufferings, death, and resurrection of Jesus, Your Son. By Your love for us, move us to love You and those about us with a love that isn't mere words, but that is real and active. Give us sympathetic hearts for those in need, that we may share

with them the things You have given us. Grant that through our love they may learn to know Your love and praise You.

We thank You that You have prepared salvation for all people, and that through the Gospel You invite all to Your kingdom. Give us opportunities to pass on Your invitation to salvation to people whom we meet in our lives, that they also may respond to Your mercy with thankful hearts. Send forth Your messengers into every corner of our world, so that the lost may rejoice in Your mercy.

Almighty Lord, guide all to whom You have given authority in our country. Bless our society with pure motives, noble goals, and moral strength. Give all Australians the desire to live before You in loving trust and obedience.

Bless our homes, and make them places of true learning and love, that all who live in them may find peace and joy in harmony with You and with one another.

We pray for Your special protection and help for the sick, the sorrowful, the aged, and the lonely. We pray especially for those in our congregation who are unwell. Comfort all who have suffered material loss, and the loss of dear ones. Meet their needs with Your mercy, and show them the wonderful things You have prepared for all Your children.

Lord God, heavenly Father, You preserved the teaching of the apostolic Church through the confession of the true faith at Augsburg. Continue to cast the bright beams of Your light upon Your Church that we, being instructed by the doctrine of the blessed apostles, may continue to walk in the light of Your truth and finally attain to the light of everlasting life; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

3rd Sunday after Pentecost

Jeremiah 20:7-13

⁷ LORD, You have deceived me
and I have let myself be deceived.
You have overpowered me, and
You have prevailed. I have become
a laughingstock all day long.

Everyone mocks me. ⁸ Each time I
speak, I cry out and proclaim,
“Violence and devastation!” The
Word of the LORD has brought me
disgrace and derision all day long.
⁹ However, when I think, “I shall
not mention Him or speak in His

name any more,” then His Word is like a burning fire in my heart, shut up in my bones. I wear myself out trying to hold it in, but I cannot do it. ¹⁰ For I have heard many people reporting: “Terror is all around you. Denounce him! Let us denounce him!” All my closest friends are watching to see me stumble, saying: “Perhaps he will be deceived. Then we shall overpower him and take our revenge on him.”

¹¹ Nevertheless, the LORD is with me like a powerful warrior. Therefore those who are persecuting me will stumble, and will not win. They will be greatly ashamed that they have not been successful. Their eternal disgrace will not be forgotten. ¹² However, LORD of hosts, You test the righteous man. You see his inmost being and thoughts. Let me see Your revenge against them! For I have disclosed my case to You. ¹³ Sing to the LORD! Praise the LORD! For He has rescued the life of a needy man from the hands of evildoers.

Romans 6:12-23

¹² Therefore let sin not keep on reigning in your mortal bodies with the result that you obey their sinful

desires! ¹³ Stop presenting the parts of your bodies to sin as weapons of unrighteousness! Rather, present yourselves to God, as people who are alive from the dead, and present the parts of your bodies to God as weapons of righteousness! ¹⁴ For sin will not be master over you. For you are not under Law, but under grace.

¹⁵ What then? Are we to sin because we are not under Law but under grace? Certainly not! ¹⁶ Do you not know that, when you present yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are the slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which results in death, or of obedience, which results in righteousness? ¹⁷ However, thanks be to God that, although you used to be the slaves of sin, you have obeyed from the heart the pattern of teaching to which you were entrusted! ¹⁸ You have been set free from sin, and have been made the slaves of righteousness. ¹⁹ I am speaking in a human way because your human nature is weak. For, as you presented the members of your bodies as slaves of uncleanness and lawlessness, leading to more lawlessness, so now, present your members as slaves of

righteousness, leading to holiness!

²⁰ For, when you were the slaves of sin, you were free concerning righteousness. ²¹ Therefore what harvest did you get from the things of which you are now ashamed? None, for the end of those things is death. ²² Rather, now, after you have been set free from sin and have been made the slaves of God, you have your harvest leading to holiness, and the end will be eternal life. ²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life, in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Matthew 10:5a, 21-33

^{5a} Jesus sent these Twelve out with the following instructions...

²¹ One brother will betray another to death and a father his child. Children will rise up against their parents and cause them to be put to death. ²² You will also be hated by all people because of My name. Nevertheless, he who endures to the end will be saved. ²³ When people persecute you in this city, flee to another! Truly, I tell you, you will certainly not finish the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes. ²⁴ A disciple is not

above his teacher, or a slave above his master. ²⁵ It is enough for the student to be like his teacher, and for a slave to be like his master. If people have been calling the master of the house ‘Beelzebul,’ how much more the members of his household!

²⁶ “Therefore do not be afraid of them! For there is nothing covered that will not be uncovered, and nothing hidden that will not be known. ²⁷ Speak in the light what I tell you in the dark, and proclaim on the housetops what you hear in your ears! ²⁸ Stop being afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul! Rather, be afraid of Him who can destroy both soul and body in hell! ²⁹ Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground without your Father. ³⁰ As for you, even the hairs on your head have all been numbered. ³¹ Therefore stop being afraid! You are worth more than many sparrows. ³² I shall confess before My Father in heaven whoever confesses Me before others. ³³ I shall also deny before My Father in heaven whoever denies Me before others.