

SERMON FOR JULY 2, 2017

TEXT: I CORINTHIANS 14:33

THEME: BEING LUTHERAN: KNOWING WHAT YOU BELIEVE

“For God is not a God of confusion, but a God of peace.”

In the name of Jesus:

Bloodletting was basic medical treatment for generations. Barbers, surgeons, and doctors regularly treated people with basic ailments through the technique called bloodletting. The process was simple: the doctor would open a patient’s vein and release some liters of blood. They believed that bleeding a patient cured a patient. So what ails you? Do you have a headache, heartburn, or hematoma? Try bloodletting! Are you anxious, depressed, or fatigued? Try bloodletting!

Now as comical as bloodletting sounds today, it was based on what was thought to be sound theory of the day and age. Starting with Hippocrates, doctors thought that the human body consisted of four basic humors: blood, yellow bile, black bile, and phlegm. Ailments occurred, they theorized, when one of these elements were out of balance. So, the thinking went like this, if the spleen produced too much black bile, a person would be melancholy. If the liver made too much yellow bile, then you would become easily angered. So bloodletting was a process in which the doctors of that day thought that the body would be put back into balance.

We can laugh now, but the results of bloodletting historically have been tragic. Historians agreed that our first President, George Washington, his death was hastened by bloodletting. Washington had a throat infection and the treatment, removing four liters of

his blood, left him anemic and weak. Washington eventually died because of...

Bloodletting.

History is full of intellectual errors. We have been wrong before, and we are fearful of being wrong again. Get this, when I was in my mother's womb, the doctor told my mom that it was okay to smoke. My mom was feeling well during the pregnancy so the doctor told her that it was okay to smoke but she should just consume a lot of oranges. So my mom's diet during pregnancy was to smoke cigarettes and eat oranges. It is a miracle of God that I was born, and understandable now why I weighed only 4 pounds and three ounces and spent months after my birth in an incubator.

So welcome, now, to the era of post modernity. We now live in an age when everything is relative, and no one can be certain of the truth. Many people today believe that there is no such thing as the truth, and as a result our brains have been drained of that which is foundational for our life. The world of post modernism teaches and believes that everything is relative. Nothing is for certain. There are no absolutes. What was true back then isn't true now. Such is our time of theological bloodletting! Walk into many universities today and you will find that students don't learn in class, they engage in constructing a life of meaning that is true to them.

In this era of theological bloodletting, the truth has been drained from our brains and our culture. Theological bloodletting takes on many forms today: Pluralism, that belief that all faiths lead to salvation; skepticism, where you only believe what makes sense to you; moralism, the belief that states the Christianity is only about teaching you how to live a good and moral life; deism, that belief (that some of the Founding Fathers

of our country had) that God is distant from His creation, God is like a watchmaker in that He made creation, wound it up and lets it go and run its own course. No wonder that there are many Christians today who are confused about what Christianity really is! No wonder so many people today are anxious, despairing, and whose souls are crying out in pain.

God gives hope and certainty to those who believe in Him. Martin Luther had such certainty. How did he obtain it? By God's grace through faith in the Holy Scriptures. You see, Lutherans have always refused to sit idly by when people are confused, especially when Christians are confused. Luther certainty stood upon the teachings of the Bible. He was not confused about what the Bible taught and neither should you be confused! For the Bible certainly teaches the truth that Adam and Eve rebelled against the Will of God. As such, all human beings have inherited sin and everyone, including you, rebel against God's will. Pretending that sin is no big deal is dangerous. And pretending that sin can be dealt with apart from Jesus Christ has hellish consequences. For the Bible is true that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. That includes you!

But the Bible teaches clearly that Jesus, God's one and only Son, came down from heaven to be your Savior. There is only one way to heaven, only one way to God, and that Way is Jesus for Jesus is the Way, the truth and the Life, no one can come to the Father except by Jesus, and there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. Jesus is your only Savior and the only Savior for the world. You have been saved by grace, through faith in Jesus,

it is a gift of God, not of works so that no one can boast, if you are going to boast, you must boast about what the Lord has done for you.

And this saving truth is revealed in the Bible, God's Holy Word. The Bible doesn't contain the word of God, it is the very Word of God. The Bible is not like a box of chocolate candy, whereby you pick and choose what you like, the Bible, every word of it, in its totality is the Word of God, God's Word written by human authors. So Lutherans believe the Bible, every word of it. Jesus treated Scripture, even the book of Genesis, as historically true and authoritative, for Jesus says: "Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female." So if God wrote the Bible, the Bible is right. God is truth and He reveals what is right and wrong in the Bible. Truth is not a matter of personal preference. People do not create truth for themselves. There aren't different degrees or variations of the truth. Truth is revealed for all and for every generation in the Bible for the Bible says: "Teach me your way, O Lord, that I may walk in Your truth, unite my heart to fear Your name."

And Lutherans believe that the local congregation and the Christian Church is unique. The Church is the Bride of Christ. The local congregation is where God comes to meet His people, it is where the Word of God is taught and the Sacraments rightly administered. The sole task of the Church is to tell sinners about Jesus. Proclaiming the Gospel is the only essential task of the Church, for Jesus is the Head of His body, the Church, He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything Jesus would be preeminent. The Church isn't about your personal preference, it is all about Jesus.

Lutherans aren't confused about the truth and Lutherans know what they believe. Martin Luther reacted against theological ignorance. Being Lutheran means that you know what you believe and why you believe it. Being Lutheran means that you know where a teaching is in the Bible, you know the doctrines of the Bible, where the passages of the Bible are, you know how to explain your faith to others and you know how to defend your faith. Spiritual confusion and Biblical incompetence is unacceptable for the Lutheran for the Lutheran believes that truth has come to us through Jesus.

That is why Martin Luther wrote the Small and Large Catechisms. He wanted every believer to know what he believed, why they believed what they believed, and that ignorance was unacceptable for the Christian. He emphasized daily Bible reading and training, for children and for adults. Luther practiced what he preached. Listen what he tells others on how the Bible was central to his life: "Yet I act as a child who is being taught the catechism. Every morning, and whenever I have the time, I read, and say, word for word, the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, the Psalms, and such." You see, Luther understood that learning the basics of the Christian faith was a life long endeavor. Even though he was a college professor, he didn't believe that he graduated from learning the teachings of the Bible. Luther described the Christian as one who was a perpetual student. As Luther understood it, one hundred years of faith was not long enough to probe the depths of the Scriptures. So Luther not only wanted to know what he believed but also why he believed.

Luther was not a theological PEZ dispenser. You remember what a PEZ dispenser does, don't you? You put PEZ candy in it so that when you want candy, all you have to

do is tip the head of the dispenser back and get a piece of candy. Sadly, many treat pastors as theological PEZ dispensers. Instead of asking the pastor:” Pastor, what do we believe about this?” Christians need to go to the Bible to find the answers. I can’t tell you what you believe. I can only tell you what it in the Bible. I can tell you what you need to believe, but I can’t believe for you, that is your job. You see, God gave you a brain for a reason. Use it! Wrestle with God, like Jacob did in the Old Testament when he asked God for a blessing. Pray for the Holy Spirit to give you a stronger faith. Ask God to guide you in your life. Chip away at your theological ignorance with urgency. God gave you a church for a reason. That is why we have worship services. It is why we have Bible studies. Join a Bible study. Come with your questions. Sit in a new member class, reread your Small Catechism, grow in the wisdom of God through the work of the Holy Spirit by reading the Bible.

God is not a God of confusion. He is the God of clarity and truth. Jesus is the Truth and He leads you from confusion to confession. Lutherans actually know what they believe. So if you have questions about your faith, read the Bible, study the Bible, attend a Bible study, ask your pastor for guidance in the Scriptures, and pray that the Holy Spirit gives you wisdom, for ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find. For being Lutheran is confessing God’s truth in a world of confusion.

Amen