

SERMON FOR JULY 23, 2017

TEXT: PSALM 34:5

THEME: STANDING OUT IN THE CROWD

“Those who look to Him are radiant, their faces shall never be ashamed.”

In the name of Jesus:

Jimmy Crum was a television personality in Columbus for many years. He was the sports director for Channel 4. Crum was well known as the host of the Woody Hayes football program, as well as one of the play by play broadcasters for Ohio State Basketball in the 1960's. In spite of Jimmy Crum's work in the media, there is one thing that he is remembered for, that is, the colorful jackets and blazers he wore whether he was out in public or on television hosting a show. Crum's blazers and sport coats are legendary. If you have never seen one in person, try to imagine a child playing with all sorts of colors and tints of paint. That is what one of his sport coats looks like. In fact, Crum used to attend the Charity Newsie sports banquet years ago when he was retired. During one of the auctions, he offered to auction his coat to the highest bidder. The bid went up to \$1000. The sports coat is still auctioned off yearly to the highest bidder, as homage to the late sportscaster. There is one thing you can say about Jimmy Crum, and that is, whenever he wore a bright colorful sports coat, which was usually the norm, Crum stood out in a crowd.

Lutherans are called to stand out in the crowd because Lutherans are unique. Ask a Lutheran what makes a Lutheran unique, you will get a variety of answers. Lutherans are unique because Lutherans are known for potlucks. Well, so are the Methodists and so are the Mormons. Potlucks don't make Lutherans unique. Some might think that

Lutherans are unique because Lutherans like to sit in the back of the church and not in the front pews. Where a person sits in church doesn't make that person a Lutheran, Catholics and Anglicans sit in the back of the church as well. Where you sit doesn't make you a Lutheran. And neither does the hymns that you sing. Lutherans are known for singing a Mighty Fortress. But Lutherans aren't the only ones who sing a Mighty Fortress, in fact, I remember singing A Mighty Fortress when I was a member of the Presbyterian Church as a youth. And one of the favorite hymns sung by the Mormon Tabernacle Choir is, you guessed it, A Mighty Fortress!

If being Lutheran is all about singing the right hymns, hosting and attending potlucks, or where you sit in the church, then being Lutheran is not all that different from any other Christian Church or for that matter, any other religion! It becomes difficult to know the difference, and to differentiate the difference, between Lutherans and any other belief. Being Lutheran means something, it means that we hold a certain confession of faith and that, as we state in our Confirmation vows: "that I intend to hold steadfast in this Confession and Church and to suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it." It means that we truly believe what we believe and that we will show what we believe to others.

Being Lutheran is not just one religion or faith among many. When you believe in Jesus, you stand out! This was true of those who followed Jesus during His life and ministry. In Biblical times there were many different beliefs held by many different Jews. The Jewish religion ran the gamut of teachings and beliefs. The Pharisees believed in strict adherence to the Law. The Saducees were sad, you see, because they

didn't believe in the resurrection. The Essenens lived in poverty and took vows of celibacy. Zealots were those Jews who were ready to go to war, the Sicarii were extreme revolutionaries. And on it went. The Jewish religion became a spectrum of different colors of belief, without really standing out among the rest.

But Jesus, Jesus stood out! When Jesus taught, He taught as One who had authority. Jesus teaching concerning the Scriptures stood out, such as the Sermon on the Mount when Jesus said:”¹⁹ Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. “ Jesus’ teachings stood out and Jesus’ ministry stood out! On the Mount of Transfiguration Jesus’ became white as lightening thereby showing His Divine nature as the Son of God in human flesh. At the cemetery Jesus stared spat in death’s face when He raised Lazarus and others from the dead. He showed mercy to all: to prostitutes, sinners, lepers, children and foreigners. Jesus stood out in His life by living His life in love for all.

Yes, Jesus’ life was different, and so was His death. To show clearly that He was God’s only Son, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the will of His Father by giving His life unto death on the cross. The Apostle Paul put it this way: “ Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted

him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name,¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father.” (Phil. 2: 5-11).

Jesus lived this different life, and died a damnable death, only to rise again on Easter so that you would be claimed by God as His child. And you are! You are a child of God, your sins are forgiven, you have been made right with God, and you have been given a new life in Jesus to live your life differently, in a way that is unlike anything that is seen in the world today. Jesus stood out from the crowd in His life, suffering, death, and resurrection, and has given to you a new life in Him so that you will stand out from the crowd and live your life to the glory of God. God has made you His child in Baptism, the Holy Spirit has given you new life in Christ, for the Bible says that if anyone is in Christ that person is a new creation. “²⁰ You have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer you who live, but Christ who lives in you. And the life you now live in the flesh you live by faith in the Son of God, who loved you and gave himself for you.” (Galatians 2: 20).

You are unique, believers in Christ are unique, because the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, dwells in you in a mystical union. You have God’s transformative power in being united in Christ. You are made new in Christ, and raised from a life of sin to a life of forgiveness, showing love to those around you, and showing Jesus in all you do to all you meet. You bear far more than just the name of Jesus, you have the power of Christ! Listen to how Martin Luther puts it: “We are altogether ignorant of our own name and do not know why we are Christians or bear the name of Christians. Surely we

are named after Christ, not because He is absent from us, but because He dwells in us, that is, because we believe in Him and are Christs to one another and do to our neighbors as Christ does to us.” (LW: 31, 368).

Christ comes to you today in His Word. With your ears you hear the Word of Christ and Christ comes into your life. With your lips you receive the body and blood of Christ in Holy Communion, for your forgiveness and so that you will live a life different from the way the rest world lives. Being a Christian, being a Lutheran, means that you are different, that you believe that Jesus is your only Lord and Savior from sin, Satan, and death, and that you stand out from the crowd because Jesus now lives in and through you!

The sinful world loves Christians when Christians are no different from the world. But Christians are called by Jesus to be different from the world in which you live. Jesus says: “Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. ¹⁷ Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, ¹⁸ and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles.” (Matthew 10:16-18).

So how will you stand out from the crowd? How will your life reflect the life and love of Christ? How can you live differently than those who don't believe in Jesus? There are many ways to live differently, thereby showing the love and life of Christ in you. You can pray before meals. Not just at home alone or with your family. You can pray when you go out to eat, praying before a meal in a restaurant. You can pray in public, not just saying:” I will keep you in my prayers,” but actually pray with and for the person on the spot, then and there, when they are in need of prayer! You can speak up

for Jesus and what is right. When someone says something wrong, or says something that disparages the good name of another, you can speak up in defense of the person. Do what Jesus would do! If someone says something offensive to you, Speak up! Tell them you find their words offensive and why! You can tithe, giving a percentage of your income to the Lord. In tithing, you are saying, “I am going to live by faith in Jesus.” I will store up for myself treasures in heaven and seek first the kingdom of God. Be bold in your faith. Invite your unchurched friends to church, and if they refuse to attend church, keep inviting them!

Being Lutheran means that you will stand up for what you believe in, even if it means standing out from the crowd because you believe in Jesus! God has made you His child in Jesus Christ to follow Jesus. May you be led by the Holy Spirit to not only believe in Jesus, but to stand out and stand up for Jesus!

To the glory of God and in Jesus’ name.

Amen