

SERMON FOR JUNE 18, 2017  
TEXT: ROMANS 5:2  
THEME: BEING LUTHERAN: OPEN TO THE GOSPEL

Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

In the name of Jesus:

Open or closed? That is the question you ask when you are headed to the store to pick something up either early in the day or late at night. Is the establishment open or closed?

Open or closed is not just a question but it is a way of life for each of us. Some of us may be open to trying new foods, to visiting new places, to considering a new idea. Others may be closed to considering something new or different. Some may not like to try new foods, because the food is too strange. A person who roots for the Ohio State Buckeyes, for example, will be closed to changing their rooting interest to another team (dare I say that team up north?).

The urge to be closed lies deep in our bones. It is in our DNA. We are closed to others. Closed to people of different ethnicities, ideologies, and cultures. Closed is our default position. Racism divides cities, genocide destroys whole tribes, and many social circles are closed to people who are members only. Yes, closed is our default position.

Another name for this closed position is original sin. The Lutheran Reformers had a fancy name for it, they called it concupiscence. What this term simply describes is the human heart, your heart, and my heart, from the time of our conception in our mother's womb. Let me try to describe this closed position, this default position, our

sinful nature in this way: Imagine for a moment that an imaginary arrow proceeds from your heart. That arrow represents your first love, your feelings, your priorities, and the like in your life. That arrow proceeding from your heart is bent, it is curved, and it curves right back to you! That is what original sin is, an arrow that is bent and curved so that your whole life turns back to you. Why, pastor, you might be thinking, that seems selfish and self-centered! You are exactly right! Your original sin is at the core the corruption of self-centeredness and selfishness, which proceeds from your heart and shows in your life.

It shows early on in the development of children. There is one word that I didn't have to teach my four children and two grandchildren. They learned it on their own, the word "Mine." Such is our sinful state, our original sin, and life as we think it and know it all comes back to the individual, to you.

The Bible says that this started with our first parents, Adam and Eve and their sin, their corruption of their heart and will is passed on to each generation. God placed Adam and Eve in the Garden. Satan tempted them by telling them: "Go ahead, take some of the fruit, that way you don't have to worship God or obey God, **you can be like God!**" And that is what Adam and Eve did, they ate some of the fruit, and their lives became all about themselves.

That is how sin works. It is passed on from parent to child, so just as you inherited your looks, the color of your eyes, and your personality from your parents; you also inherited their sin. It is now your sin, and there is no escaping sin in this life. Sin

manifests itself in having no need for God or other people. Your nature is so corrupted that your desires have been bent away from God and away from others.

We lived closed lives and it shows! Just as Adam and Eve hid in the Garden once they disobeyed God, so you and I try to hide before a holy and just God. We try to hide from God when we make excuses, just like Adam and Eve did. “It’s not my fault, God, that I ate the apple, it was the serpent who tempted me.” “It’s not my fault, God, it was the woman that **You gave me.**” Just like Adam and Eve you seek to offer excuses to God for your wrongdoings. You try to justify yourself before God, all in attempt to make yourself right in God’s eyes for your sinful thoughts, words, and actions. When you try to justify yourself before God, you aren’t seeking God’s forgiveness. Instead, you are closing off God’s forgiveness for you saying that I can excuse myself for what I have done, so God should do the same.

But you and I live closed lives with one another. When I was little, and my sister wanted to tell me something I didn’t want to hear, I would put my hands to my ears to shut my ears and sing out loudly: “I can’t hear you, I can’t hear you.” Today each of us tunes out the needs of those around us. Just notice how many people walk around with their earpieces in their ears listening to music, or are preoccupied with looking at their phone during a conversation. Some people would rather surf the Internet than interact with others.

Yes, examples abound that we are as sinners closed to the love of God and the needs of our neighbor. And God says that this closure pays a price. It brings death, physical and eternal death, for the wages of sin is death!

God has responded to this closed nature of our called sin, by sending His one and only Son, Jesus, as the remedy for your sinful condition. Jesus' nature was not like ours, in that He was perfect God and perfect Man in one Being. He was the true and only God-Man, 100% God and 100 % Man in human flesh. His nature, His heart, and His will were perfect. Jesus had the only heart, the only will where the arrow proceeding from His heart turned outward, to God! His will was not twisted and bent to Himself; rather, Jesus said that His will was to do the will of His Father who sent Him. That is why Jesus came down from heaven, why His Father at Jesus' Baptism said: "This is My Son, listen to Him" and why the Holy Spirit came down and landed on Jesus' shoulder. Throughout Jesus' life He lived His life according to God's will, loving God first and foremost and then showing His love for His Father by living His life for others. Jesus at many times in His life and ministry revealed His purpose for living and dying on the cross: "For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many, and God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son so that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life."

What is God's will for you? Simply this: God wills that you be saved, indeed, He wills that all be saved and come to know the truth about God's love for sinners in Jesus Christ. He earnestly desires that you would be open to receiving the forgiveness that Jesus paid for on the cross in the empty tomb. God wants you to believe in Jesus, to receive His forgiveness, life, and salvation. It has been given to you as a free gift, for it is "by grace you have been saved through faith in Christ, not of works, so that no one may boast." This is God's Good News for you, and for all! Jesus came to save sinners! Jesus

came to life His life for you, to die His death in your place, and to rise again to live forever!

This is the Gospel; it is God's Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ! This Good News is not just for you to keep, it is yours to believe and share. God's Good News of salvation is for all!

This is what makes us Lutheran and this Gospel of Jesus Christ is foundational for Lutherans, it was the reason for the Reformation. You see, at various points in church history, people have attempted to close others to access of the Gospel. Before the time of the Reformation, the church service was conducted in Latin. The average German couldn't speak much less understands Latin. So what did many people do but tune out to the message of the Gospel. They couldn't understand it, so why listen to it? This was true of worship, of the liturgy, of the sermon, the people couldn't understand the simple message of the Bible, and so they didn't listen to it.

As this continued, many did not know what to believe or what they were supposed to believe. The Roman Catholic Church at that time exploited the people. The populace was told by the Church that sins would only be forgiven if you purchased a piece of paper called an Indulgence. Instead of placing your faith in Jesus, you would place your faith in a piece of paper that you bought that said that you were forgiven for a certain amount of time. The Christian's life focused on what the individual had to do to earn salvation. The message of God's love in Jesus was twisted into something that became closed for all.

So Martin Luther pushed back, nailed 95 Theses to the Church door in Wittenberg. Luther railed against the errors that were being taught and believed in the Church, and led the Church back to the truth of the Gospel, God's love open to everyone all because of Jesus.

That is why Lutherans are all about being open to the Gospel, because Lutherans are all about the Gospel. For God has saved you by grace through faith in Christ. This gift is for you and for all. He gives you this Gift of Salvation in your Baptism, where your sins are washed away and the Holy Spirit gives you faith to believe in Jesus. Jesus comes to you offering Himself in, with and under the bread and wine for the forgiveness of your sins and the strengthening of your faith.

And it is because of Jesus that we as Lutherans are still open to the Gospel and excited about sharing the Gospel with others! To be certain the sharing of the Gospel is threatened: when we fail to open our mouths to invite someone to church and tell him or her about Jesus, when Lutheran churches and schools close and can't tell others about Jesus. And to be clear the open sharing of the Gospel is under attack, due to political correctness when we are more concerned about not offending people instead of telling them about Jesus; when we are a congregation squabble over petty issues, when we fail to stand up for the truthfulness of the Gospel, and when we turn a blind eye to sin, minimize sin, and fail to hear God's call of repentance for all.

Being Lutheran and being open to the Gospel means that we refuse to let anything close the Gospel of Jesus Christ to others. So openly pray with and for your co-worker who is struggling. Don't be ashamed to read the Bible at home and in public. Openly

tell your friends about the hope that you have in Jesus Christ. And openly stand up for the truth of the Bible, for the Gospel is opening being Lutheran.

To the glory of God and in Jesus' name.

Amen