

EVERYONE WHO ACKNOWLEDGES ME BEFORE ME, I ALSO WILL ACKNOWLEDGE BEFORE MY FATHER WHO IS IN HEAVEN, BUT WHOEVER DENIES ME BEFORE MEN, I ALSO WILL DENY BEFORE MY FATHER WHO IS IN HEAVEN.

“U. A. C.” You see these letters in the entryway every time you enter this house of God. So what do they mean and why are they there?

The letters “U.A.C.” stand for “Unaltered Augsburg Confession”. The founding fathers of this congregation vowed themselves to the Augsburg Confession [*I quote from your Constitution*] “as a true and sound exposition of Christian doctrine taken from and in full agreement with the Holy Scriptures.”

2017 marks the 500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation. And, as you know, we are having special services throughout the year to mark this historic occasion. Today, we celebrate another.

On June 25, 1530, the Augsburg Confession was presented and read to the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles the 5<sup>th</sup>. It was a summary statement of what the Lutherans believed, taught, and confessed. More importantly, the Confession was, and is, what Holy Scripture confesses. In the preface to the Confession, our forefathers wrote:

"In dutiful obedience to Your Imperial Majesty, we offer and present a confession of our pastors' and preachers' teaching and of our own faith, setting forth how and in what manner, on the basis of the Holy Scriptures, these things are preached, taught, communicated, and embraced in our lands."

To this day, it remains the defining statement of what Lutherans confess and what it means to be Lutheran.

Those who confessed the teachings of the Augsburg Confession were doing what the Church has always done down through the ages -- they were "saying the same thing that Jesus Christ had spoken in His Word".

I think the word "confess" is often "under-translated" in our minds. What I mean is that when we hear "confess," I think we understand it only as "confess your sins." That is part of confession, to be certain. But, the word "confess" simply means to "say the same thing." In the context of the Bible, it really means to say back to Jesus the very Words He says to us. Confessing Christ is to say the same thing Christ Jesus Himself said.

And so, now as then, believers in Jesus – and that means His Church -- have always been willing to confess the truths of the Bible, no matter what. The Bible says that God created the world, so we, as believers, confess, "I believe in God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth." The Bible teaches that Jesus Christ is God in the flesh, who came to redeem and restore all people back to Himself, so we, as believers, confess,

"I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from all eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord, who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death".

And, to confess Jesus is to hear His beautiful promise:

"Everyone who acknowledges [confesses] Me before men, I also will acknowledge before My Father who is in heaven" (Mt 10:32–33).

But our text teaches us that there are consequences to confessing Jesus. Jesus reminded the disciples that there would be challenges and obstacles to face in proclaiming His Good News.

How many times have we seen the Gospel transform a person's life, giving them the joy that only comes from the forgiveness of sins? But then, that same Gospel creates new challenges in family relationships, in personal relationships, even in the tension that comes when one seeks to live a different life than the one lived before becoming a believer. The itching ears of the world today do not want to hear about sin, why babies need baptism, that Holy Communion is the true body and blood of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins and that when we commune at a church's altar, we are giving public witness that we agree with the church's teachings, or that marriage is between a male and a female.

Allow me to take that one step further. How many times have we seen the world in which we live, especially the media and the entertainment community, mock and ridicule Christians? You know I like to ask this question: When was the last time you saw a Christian, especially a pastor, portrayed in a positive way in a movie or on TV? Christians are almost always portrayed as narrow-minded bigots or sin-loving hypocrites. All of this makes sharing Christ even more difficult. There is a lot of fear that comes with the challenges before us.

But, this is nothing new. There is real danger for confessing Christ. Luther confessed "Here I Stand!," at Worms and a price was put on his head so that he had to hide out at Wartburg Castle. When our Fathers presented the Confession to the Holy Roman Emperor at Augsburg in 1530, they were not just saying they had a difference of opinion, they were putting themselves in danger of execution for the sake of the Gospel.

So, I think that it's fair to ask: Why would these people risk their lives for this public confession? Why would anyone do that?

To answer that question, let's go to the Bible, to the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter of John's Gospel. After feeding the crowd with five loaves and two fish, Jesus taught them that He is the "living bread that came down from heaven...Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever" (vv. 51, 58). But they did not want that bread, they wanted bread for their stomachs, so many turned back and no longer walked with Jesus. So, He asked the Twelve, "Do you want to go away as well?" (v. 67). And Peter answers, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life (v. 68). There's nowhere else to go but to Jesus for forgiveness and life.

The book of Acts says it this way, "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Ac 4:12). And Jesus Himself says, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me (Jn 14:6). The reason that Christians have publicly proclaimed Jesus as their Savior no matter the risk is because, in Him alone, there is eternal salvation. In Him alone, there is life, now and forever!

Why else would our Lutheran Fathers in 1530 confess this Jesus despite the dangers? It was good for their souls. But, they weren't there just for themselves. They also knew and believed that others needed to hear this Good News.

The whole context of this teaching in Matthew 10 is in the midst of Jesus sending out His disciples to confess His message of salvation for the whole world. These disciples were unsure of themselves, even afraid of what might happen as they did. But Jesus comforts them with the knowledge that,

“Whoever confesses Me before others, I will confess before My Father!”

As He tells the disciples later, “I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20). The message you share will not only bless others, it will keep you as well. Don’t be afraid! Don’t fear men more than you fear God! **CONFESS AWAY!** Confess Jesus at your kitchen table, with your spouse, your children, your grandchildren, at the coffee shop, at the 4<sup>th</sup> of July get together, confess Jesus every day to every person you meet. After all, it is not happenstance that these people are in your life. God brings them into your life so that you can confess Christ to them.

Confess Christ. That’s a message worth dying for, worth living for, because in Him is life and salvation, now and forever to all who believe. Confess away.

TO GOD BE THE GLORY. AMEN.