



2017 LWML Sunday Sermon

Text: 2 Timothy 4:1-4

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“Be Ready to Confess Jesus”

2017 is really a rather amazing year. First off, of course, it is the 500th anniversary of Luther’s posting of the 95 Theses. The whole world is paying attention to Luther this year. In fact, it seems like 2017 is all Luther all the time—24/7/365! This is a big deal!

But there is even more to 2017. This year marks the 75th anniversary of the Lutheran Women’s Missionary League, our LWML, which has done so much to encourage and support the sharing of Christ’s gospel within our Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and among partners and friends throughout the world. This is a big deal!

In the half millennium since the Reformation began and the 75 years since the LWML formally organized itself, confessing the faith has not gotten any easier. In fact, it may be even more difficult for us to speak and to live as Christians today. And who knows what the future might hold for us, our children, and our grandchildren? Yet God is faithful and has promised that His church will survive all the challenges that the devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh can throw at us.

Building on God’s promises, we know that this is our time to be distinctly Lutheran. As confessing Lutherans in a rapidly changing world and in an increasingly hostile culture, we need to **Be Ready to Confess** the Gospel of Christ to a world that desperately needs to hear it.

I. Confessing Christ is Central to Our Identity as Christians

To be proclaimers of the message of salvation is central to our identity as Christ’s people.

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching (2 Timothy 4:1-2).

When Saint Paul wrote these words to Timothy, he did so as one writing to a fellow pastor, a man specifically called to carrying out the office of the public ministry. And he did so also knowing full well the challenges that faced preachers of the Gospel in the setting of the early church. But he did so also knowing that Timothy had come to the faith through the Holy Spirit working through faithful teaching of a committed mother and grandmother. *I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well (2 Timothy 1:5).*

The good news of the Gospel is given to each of us to share with those whom God places in our sphere of influence regardless of our station in life. Proclaiming the salvation won by Jesus is not just “the pastor’s job.” Every single one of us is all called to be ready to confess Christ as God opens the doors for us to do so. You are called to be ready to confess!

The need for sharing Christ is as pronounced today as it has ever been. While it is true that somewhere around 90 percent of Americans claim that they believe in “God,” their understanding of the one, true God is often less than biblical. Add to that the fact that upwards of 60 percent of Evangelical Christians (a category that would include LCMS members) think there may be other ways to salvation outside of faith in Jesus, and the need to be ready to confess the message of salvation by grace alone through faith alone because of Christ alone is as pressing today as ever.

Add to that Paul’s realistic assessment of where people were at his time.

For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths (2 Timothy 4:3-4).

It sounds like a commentary on 2017!

II. Luther Was Ready to Confess

But not just 2017 – also 1517. The setting in which God called Martin Luther to confess Christ was easily as confused as our own day. Worship of saints had intruded on worship of Christ; works were preached as necessary to salvation in addition to faith in Christ; purgatory, images, relics, and other aberrations had obscured the Gospel of salvation in Christ alone.

This context, of course, led to the unique character of the Lutheran Reformation. For Luther, as he read the New Testament and particularly read Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, was confronted by the question of righteousness: What does it mean to be right in God’s eyes? And the Scriptures were clear to him: keep God’s law perfectly. However, he knew that he did not keep God’s law perfectly; he knew that he did not keep God’s law sufficiently.

Oh, he tried to make things right. He went to his priest repeatedly and confessed his sins. He dredged up every thought, word, deed from a lifetime of sin, confessed it, was conditionally absolved, and then went and did good works as a satisfaction. But as he worked, he remembered other sins. His mind recalled other things that he had done, and he realized that his confession of sin was insufficient. And that meant his works were not enough. Finally, his priest confronted him: “Luther, it is not that God hates you; it is that you hate God.”

The dam finally broke when Luther understood, through the Scriptures, that the righteousness of God is not about us being good enough. The righteousness of God is about Christ who is perfect. Christ, the God-man, who has completed salvation for Luther, for you, and for me, perfectly, once and for all. There is a great exchange that occurs. The filthy rags of our sinfulness and rebellion towards God, Jesus took upon Himself, carried it to the cross, and crucified it once and for all. The perfect righteousness that is His, He now clothes us in and through the waters of Holy Baptism. Where before there was sinner, God *now* sees his perfectly redeemed child through Christ; where before the person was far from God, there is *now* a child of God. God’s work is for us and is applied to us freely and completely because of Christ.

III. God Calls Us to Be Ready to Confess This Gospel

This—the biblical Gospel—is what we must be ready to confess!

Luther didn't see all of this clearly in 1517. It took a few years for him to work out all of the scriptural implications. But once he did he was ready to confess—and he did so to the end of his life in 1546.

Which poses a question for us. How do we, like Luther, prepare ourselves to be ready to confess?

Today in particular, as we've already noted, we want to recall the work of the Lutheran Women's Missionary League, which is celebrating its diamond anniversary this year.

The LWML has had a marvelous impact on the mission efforts of the congregations, districts, seminaries, and other entities of our Synod. And it has done so always by carrying out faithfully its mission “to assist each woman of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in affirming her relationship with the Triune God so that she is enabled to use her gifts in ministry to the people of the world.”

There is never a perfect time to start an organization like the LWML, but could we have chosen a time more challenging than 1942? The world had been at war for three years and the United States had joined the effort in 1941. Rations were short, many young—and older!—men were preparing to fight overseas. Women were entering the workforce to fill the vacancies left by the new soldiers. The circumstances were challenging, to say the least!

Yet, on July 7-8, 1942, over 100 women—among them twenty-eight formal delegates—met in Chicago and established the LWML. Its purpose was to encourage a greater consciousness among women for “missionary education, missionary inspiration, and missionary service.” It also decided to gather funds for mission projects above and beyond the Synod's budget. From this humble beginning—and through the use of the now familiar “Mite Boxes”—the League has blessed the mission efforts of congregations, districts, and synod in amazingly powerful ways!

But there is more, as LWML historian Marlys Taeye Moburg has captured it so well:

...the blessing of the LWML, now also known as Lutheran Women in Mission, goes far beyond the millions raised for missions. Its benefits can be seen in faith deepened through Bible studies, in confidence built through leadership training, in the befriending of career missionaries, in blankets and clothing gathered for the impoverished, in food shared with the hungry and, above all, in the friendships nurtured and the lives changed by sharing the love of Jesus Christ.¹

“Time marches on,” as we all know so well, and it seems that as we age it marches at the double quick. The Lutheran confession has always struggled against the intrusion of false teaching. But the Lord has been faithful and has raised up faithful pastors like Timothy who have preached the pure Gospel of Jesus Christ crucified for our sins and raised for our justification. And the Lord has gathered faithful men, women, and children who have carried out the work of the Lord with zeal and devotion, meeting the challenges and opportunities to reach out to those who need to hear the Gospel. Simply put, our faithful God keeps His promises and we pray this Sunday and always that He will always enable us to be ready to confess.

¹Marlys Taeye Moberg, “History of the LWML,” <https://unite-production.s3.amazonaws.com/tenants/lwml/attachments/21814/lutheran-women-mission-history-rev.pdf>, accessed April 3, 2017.

