



*“What Does This Mean?”*

A Devotional Series  
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## New Series: What Does This Mean? Introduction: What Does It Mean to be Lutheran in the 21st Century?

Between snips of the scissors in the barber's chair at my local Great Clips, I tried to explain "Lutheranism." After three strikes, I was out. And out of my league!

Strike one: "So, you guys must be followers of Martin Luther King Jr.?"

I didn't have time to explain Wittenberg, Wartburg and Worms.

Strike two: "So, you guys are like a hybrid between Roman Catholics and Baptists."

I didn't have a copy of Lutheranism 101 in my car.

Strike 3: "So, if you're a priest, how can you be married with three kids?"

I didn't feel like explaining the birds and the bees.

I quickly changed the topic of the conversation to Alabama football before we broached the difference between the LCMS, ELCA, WELS, and any other alphabetical soup of Lutheranism.

If you are a Lutheran, living outside of the heartland of Lutheranism in the Midwest, you can easily relate. For those of us who live in 35 of the 50 states where Lutheranism isn't a household name...it is a huge challenge. And even if you live in the Midwest...it is becoming a challenge. Maybe it has already arrived in your community?

Politicians stick to "talking points" for a variety of reasons. Some bad.

Some good. One good reason is to clearly communicate a message.

This devotional series is an attempt to provide "talking points" for us to share this gift of Lutheran Christianity with others. Not theological jargon.

Not theological buzz words. Not pastors explaining it in a way to impress fellow pastors. But putting Lutheranism into language we can use to

introduce Lutheranism to our son's girlfriend whose never met a Lutheran in their life. My daughter attended Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) at her school. Not a single Lutheran in the group. Not a single person had ever even met a Lutheran. More than once she came home asking, "How do I explain what Lutherans believe?"

And maybe along the way it can help us grow in our own understanding of Lutheranism.

In the end, hopefully we can see that Lutheranism doesn't have to be difficult. It is simply talking about Jesus.

And the first "talking point" about Lutheranism is that we let Jesus speak for Himself.



# **What Does It Mean to be Lutheran in the 21st Century?"**

## **DAY 1**

### **Talking Point: Let Jesus Speak For Himself.**

Confession time.

I have a bad habit. And it is a "Hard Habit to Break." To quote the title of an old hit from the 80's musical group Chicago.

I have the bad habit of interrupting my wife when she is talking. We can be with family or friends and when she tells a story I have a tendency to interject and "help" her tell the story. (I don't know much about marriage, but I do know this is the quickest way to the doghouse!)

Coaching her along in the conversation seems reasonable to me! After all, as a preacher, I fancy myself a 'professional storyteller.' She won't mind if I mansplain and give her an assist! She should appreciate me coaching her along the way. "What you meant to say is..."

But interrupting someone in a conversation is just plain rude!

It's obnoxious.

It's impolite.

It's disrespectful.

It's courteous to just let someone speak without interrupting!

Have you ever as the Bride, the Church, interrupted the Bridegroom, Jesus?

What does it mean to be Lutheran? Lutherans try to resist the urge to interject when Jesus is telling the story - the great love story of salvation history. After all, it is His Story! Not ours to tell! We don't need to humansplain to God!

Lutherans focus on letting Jesus speak for Himself.

There has always been the temptation, when hearing the Word of God, to think we need to help Jesus. Lutheran don't believe Jesus needs any help.

The Word can stand on its own.

He is the Master, we are the student.

He is the Professor, we are the pupil.

Nor does the Holy Spirit need coaching. Nor do the writers of Sacred Scripture, inspired by the Holy Spirit, need our assistance.

Instead of letting Jesus speak for Himself, it is easy as Christians to interject and say, "I think what Jesus is trying to say is..."

We interrupt with our human reason, our emotions, cultural trends, past traditions, and our opinions.

To be Lutheran is to resist this urge! But it is a hard habit to break!

When you commune this morning and Jesus says: "This is my body, this is my blood. Given and shed for the forgiveness of sins." It's easy to fall into bad habits and try and explain to others what Jesus is REALLY trying to say...human reason has a hard time comprehending the miracle of His true presence in the Lord's Supper so we can humansplain to God. When the Holy Spirit says marriage is one man and one woman it is easy to let culture humansplain to God. When our Saviour tells us that He loves us, even if our feelings have convinced us we are unlovable - let Jesus speak for Himself!

It's why we remember Reformation every year! When we recall "Scripture Alone," it is not just some narrow-minded, archaic, sterile, and dogmatic view of the Bible. It's not religious OCD to follow the rule book.

Today is the day that we remember the common decency and honor to allow someone to speak for themselves. We do it for a friend! We can do it for our Savior!

Especially, when this is the "Holy, Holy, Holy."

To honor God and honor His Word is to resist the temptation to feel like we have to clean up The Story!

What a story He has to tell!

When someone asks you what Lutherans believe, just tell them that we let Jesus speak for Himself!

# **"What does it mean to be Lutheran in the 21st Century?"**

## **DAY 2**

### **Talking Point: Let Jesus Answer For Himself.**

Shakespeare once said, "All the world is a stage."

Well, for this devotional, "All the world is interpretation."

Life is lived moment by moment interpreting information.

Should I floor it and beat the red light at the intersection?

Should I add a little more secret sauce to the mystery meatloaf?

Should the old geezer pastor go out and try and play kickball with the youth group or will he just pull another hamstring?

Should I spend my bonus on a new fishing boat or purchase nursing home insurance?

Should I grab the umbrella after looking at the sky?

All the world is interpretation.

The question isn't whether we will have to make some calls in life, but will we make good calls or bad calls.

So why are there so many different Christian groups, or denominations?

Yes, interpretation.

It really shouldn't come as a surprise.

But nothing can make our heads spin like a class on denominational differences. It is frustrating!

We all know Christians who are exhausted by the battle of Biblical interpretation. Maybe you are one of them!

Denomination A says "x."

Denomination B says "y."

Denomination C says "z."

People are frustrated with wading through different denominations and the different interpretations. I get that!

Are you a Pre-Tribulational Premillennialist, Post-Tribulational (Dispensationalist) Premillennialist, Postmillennialist, or Amillennialist?

Ugh!

For some, in their opinion, they think joining a non-denominational church is the parachute out of the tribalism of the denominational airplane that is about to crash and burn.

But non-denominationalism in the end is just another denomination. As Shakespeare said, "A rose by any other name."

To be honest with ourselves the generic aspirin you pick up from the drug store is in the end just another brand.

As Christians we shouldn't let Biblical interpretation get us down! Nor is it an excuse to walk away from the church!

Because if you walk away from the church over interpretation you have to walk away from all of life. Because "all the world is interpretation."

Lutherans are not frustrated by interpretation. Digging deep into Scripture is a privilege! Studying Scripture is a gift!

Searching the Scriptures is a joy!

Challenge? Certainly. Joy? Absolutely.

Jesus is our first love! Just like you fall in love with your soul mate and want to learn everything about them, we want to learn as much as possible about Jesus!

Yes, at times, interpretation can leave us with questions!

So, here is the Lutheran answer to the questions we have when we deal with a difficult passage of Scripture requiring an interpretation.

Lutherans let Jesus answer the question for Himself.

We call it: "Scripture interprets Scripture." When there is an unclear passage we go to the clear, or clearer, passage for the answer.

We don't guess.

We don't flip a coin.

We don't conjecture.

We don't extrapolate.

We don't take a poll.

We don't ask our Ivy League cousin.

We don't go by a church vote.

What does it mean to be Lutheran? It means when a passage is unclear and there are varied interpretations, we don't get frustrated. Because all the world is about making wise interpretations with information. The Christian faith is no different.

The question is not whether there will be interpretation but whether it is a good or bad interpretation.

What is a good method of interpretation?

For a Lutheran it means letting Jesus answer the question for Himself!

# **"What does it mean to be Lutheran in the 21st Century?"**

## **DAY 3**

### **Talking Point: Let Jesus Pick the Topic of Conversation.**

The lector shared the lesson from the lectionary at the lectern.

To quote Jeff Foxworth, "You might be a Lutheran if you can make sense of the above sentence."

Translated: The reader reads the Scripture reading from the podium. (Not sure if that is much better).

Lutherans follow a set schedule of Scripture lessons picked for each Sunday of the church year. This schedule is called the lectionary. There are pros and cons to everything in life.

There is one tremendous blessing with the lectionary. We talk about what Jesus wants us to talk about.

It is the reason why Lutherans follow the lectionary. To be Lutheran means Jesus picks the topic in these "holy conversations" as we gather in His house.

Modern churches are in a constant quest to be relevant. People often lament that the church is irrelevant in today's world.

Out of touch.

Out dated.

But here is a Lutheran difference! Lutherans believe God decides what is relevant, not us. This is a HUGE principle to share with family and friends.

In our quest to be relevant in modern America we forgot to ask the question: "who determines what is relevant?"

The lectionary is a valuable tool in our faith toolbox.

Why? The lectionary walks us through all of Scripture, well, mostly all of it.

If you have ever tried to read through the Bible, only to get stuck in Leviticus, the lectionary in three years will get you through a large chunk of the Bible.

A 12 week sermon series on marriage is good. A 10 week sermon series on the signs of the end times is great.

A 6 week series on money management may or may not be beneficial.

A 4 week series on self esteem might be helpful.

But in the end we miss Blind Bartimaeus, the Woman at the Well, the Prodigal, the Bread of Life, the Wedding at Cana and Nicodemus.

But are these really relevant to our everyday life? Yes!

To be Lutheran means Jesus is my Saviour and also my Lord. And as Lord of my life He is the God over all - even over the determination of what is relevant.

When Jesus told the apostles to make disciples of all nations He also instructed them to teach "everything." We call this the whole counsel of God!

The lectionary keeps us focused on what Jesus wants us to stay focused on...it's not always politics, the economy, social issues, ethical dilemmas, social justice, or the environment.

Sports fans are notorious bandwagoners. Christians can also ride a hobby horse. Big on race relations but silent on kids bullied because they are obese. I venture to say just as many kids are bullied in school because of body image as skin color. Scripture doesn't skip or focus on only one group. Jesus stops for everyone in every place! Some are big on protecting the environment but not interested in protecting the unborn. Big on vengeance and justice but little on forgiveness and reconciliation.

The lectionary keeps us honest.

Sure, there are times the lectionary can be frustrating.

I remember one time I finally got a neighbor to come to church after months of inviting. The one Sunday he finally shows up is the one when the readings talk about circumcision! I was thinking to myself, "you have got to be kidding me!"

So, that is the job of the pastor. To talk with Jesus from Monday to Saturday so that the pastor can talk about Jesus on Sunday with you. Bringing the "then and there" of the Bible to the "here and now" of today. Pastors strike out from time to time. But sometimes they hit a home run even when you think they struck out. Sometimes you might think they hit a home run but actually struck out. Keep that in mind. Why? The quest for relevance can easily turn irreverent!

Thank your pastor for not being "relevant." It will make his day!

Lutherans believe God determines what is relevant! Not us. The quest for relevance has become the Golden Calf of our age.

Over the years in ministry I've come to appreciate the lectionary. It saves me from the temptation of the dog chasing its tail.

We are not enslaved to the lectionary, it is a servant.

Yes, there is more than one way to accomplish a goal.

For Lutherans and our goal to let Jesus pick the topic of conversation, the lectionary is a gift that keeps on giving!

# **"What Does It Mean to be Lutheran in the 21st Century?"**

## **DAY 4**

### **Talking Point: Let Jesus Have It Both Ways.**

"That's not fair! You can't have it both ways!"

Ever been in an argument when someone is trying to have it both ways? Remember the famous Lincoln-Douglas debates? Douglas accused Lincoln of being "two faced" by saying two things that seemed to be contradictory. Lincoln, who wasn't exactly photogenic and had a rather homely appearance, replied to the accusation: "If I had two faces do you think I would be wearing this one?"

What does it mean to be Lutheran? Lutherans gladly let Jesus have it both ways.

What does this mean?

The Bible often says two things that seem to be in contradiction with one another. These passages often seem to be opposites that don't make sense to our reason or our experience. We call them paradoxes.

While they appear two faced because of our sin that limits our understanding; in reality, they reveal the beautiful face of a gracious God! How can the last be first and the first be last? How are the humbled exalted and the exalted humbled?

We often want it to be one or the other.

We often want it to be either/or.

But Jesus tells us it is both/and.

How can it be both bread/wine and body/blood in the Lord's Supper?

How can God be both Judge and Savior?

How can it be our fault if we are condemned to hell but it's God's credit if we go to heaven? Shouldn't it be our fault if we go to hell and our credit if we go to heaven? That makes more sense. It's consistent!

How can someone be unrighteous before a human judge yet righteous before The Judge?

How can someone be a terrible sinner on death row with a home in prison yet at the same time be a blessed saint with a home in heaven?

How can someone be pro-life and be against abortion yet for the death penalty?

Remember the old Miller Lite commercial? Arguing back and forth about whether it tastes great or is less filling. It seems like only one can be true because beverages that taste good aren't suppose to be low on calories. But bad things happen when we try to "solve" these divine paradoxes.

We can and should grieve with tears of sadness and gladness! Keep the tension! Don't try and fix this tension.

I guess it goes back to letting Jesus speak for Himself. And when He does He might say a few things that go against our human reason. Which is just fine for Lutherans!

For God's reason is higher than ours. His thoughts are higher than ours. His ways are higher than ours.