

**“So everyone who acknowledges me before men, 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.”**

Yesterday was June 24<sup>th</sup>, and on that day we observed the nativity of John the Baptist. Conveniently six months before Christmas, John the Baptist is six months younger than Jesus, his cousin. John the Baptist paved the way for the Messiah, pointing to the Christ.

In his life he boldly proclaimed Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He did so in the wilderness as people from the cities came to see him. He yelled at the religious elites: **“You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?”** He did so even as he went to Herod to condemn him for marrying Herodias, his brother’s wife.

John the Baptist was eager to confess Jesus Christ. He was eager to confess what marriage was and should be to Herod. How can you know that Christ is the bridegroom of the Church if you don’t know what marriage is? To confess Christ is to confess God’s Word, and to confess God’s Word is to confess Christ.

Today is June 25<sup>th</sup>, and the Lutheran Church commemorates the presentation of the Augsburg Confession which happened this day in 1530. This day, I think personally, more than October 31<sup>st</sup>, 1517, is Reformation Day because it is this day that the Lutherans presented before emperor and the Church the Augsburg Confession, the clearest teaching of what the Lutherans believe, teach, and confess in a formal twenty-eight article document read before the emperor and the bishops of the Roman Catholic Church.

Ironically, not a pastor, but a layman read this document. Christian Beyer read this in a loud voice so that even people standing in the streets could understand Him. He read it in German, the people’s language, so they could hear this confession in their own ears. To confess Christ is to confess God’s Word, and to confess God’s Word is to confess Christ.

Tomorrow is June 26<sup>th</sup>, and on June 26<sup>th</sup>, 2015, eight years ago, was the fateful Obergefell decision regarding gay marriage. Gay marriage became a protected right in the U.S. Constitution, and America has not been the same since. And so it is that Christians in the past eight years have been increasing pressure for simply confessing that marriage is between one man and one woman, and that no human is born in the wrong body.

People like cake baker Jack Philipps and florist Barronelle Stutzman have been taken before courts over refusing to provide cakes and flowers for gay weddings.

This may seem secondary to the Gospel message, but it is part of the bigger picture. If you don’t know what marriage is, how can you know the relationship between Christ the bridegroom and his bride, the Church? If you start picking and

choosing clear teachings of Scripture, what prevents someone from throwing out the Gospel in that process? To confess Christ is to confess God’s Word, and to confess God’s Word is to confess Christ. 3. Jesus commands us to confess Him.

And, of course, this confession: yesterday, today, and tomorrow is not without pressures. John the Baptist was pleased to confess Christ, but even in Matthew 10, Jesus warns us: **“Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, and you will be hated by all for my name’s sake.”**

Death, persecution, destruction of body, being hated, all these Jesus promises. You know that John the Baptist wasn’t very welcome among the Pharisees and Sadducees. Not only was John imprisoned because of his confession and proclamation of Herod’s sin, but Herodias put John’s head on a platter—executed because Herod made a unwise promise at a party.

John the Baptist served as a template for the prophets who went before him. The only difference being that John was the only one who saw Jesus with His own eyes, but other than that the prophets: Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Daniel, they were all persecuted in their own ways. To confess Christ is to confess God’s Word, and to confess God’s Word is to confess Christ.

Today as we consider the presentation of the Augsburg Confession, that was not without its drama. In the days leading up to that, the Lutherans were pressured to compromise with their opponents. One would have thought Luther would have been present for the Presentation at Augsburg, but he was in hiding as he was still declared an outlaw.

The Lutherans faced constant pressure throughout their early years of existence. Many wars were fought throughout history to defend our confession by the point of the sword. To confess Christ is to confess God’s Word, and to confess God’s Word is to confess Christ.

Tomorrow is June 26<sup>th</sup>, the anniversary of the Obergefell decision, and we see increased chaos and persecution, perhaps not to the point of bloodshed, but social exclusion, lawsuits, and hatred and animosity over Christians who haven’t been changing what they’re teaching but have been teaching the same things they’ve been teaching for centuries: that marriage is between one man and one woman, and that you are born the gender that matches your biology.

Today is a happy day as we celebrate the welcome of another child of God into His kingdom through Baptism. But as you drove in the sign said, “You will be hated by all for my name.” Not least of whom is Satan Himself who hates baptism and the Church. In Baptism, Ezra just had God’s name placed on Him and He has been sealed for salvation. Delany and Matt, Azalea and Brian, the baptism this morning was a declaration of war against Satan and his armies, we shouldn’t be surprised to face persecution from it! To confess Christ is to confess God’s Word,

and to confess God's Word is to confess Christ. 2. Confession of Christ can cost us even our lives.

Yet we receive promises from God in our text today. **“So have no fear of them, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known... And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.”** And so we see that all of this makes sense as we consider what John the Baptist, the Reformers, and the Christians today are contending for, and it's the Good News of the Gospel.

When we have denied Christ, Christ has not denied us. When we want to shift the blame onto someone else, Christ can gladly claim the blame as His, taking it to the cross, rather than letting us suffer on behalf of our sins. He **“...was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.”** Because Jesus rose again on the third day, we know that before the Father, we are declared righteous and we have His promise of eternal life. We know our sins are forgiven and there is a new creation waiting for us. Christ is coming again.

What that means is that Christ is coming again to judge the living and the dead, this is not something to be afraid of, but to welcomed. We know that Jesus is going to make all things right. He will not forget the persecutions of those who have hurt His little lambs, who have persecuted His Church. Those pains we suffer will not go unpunished, our redemption is coming! We know help is on the way.

And so, we stand with the likes of John the Baptist. In the resurrection we can ask Him what it was like to speak up against the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herod. We'll be able to see the Reformers again in the resurrection to ask them all about the Presentation of the Augsburg Confession.

Dear Christian friend, you don't need to wait until the resurrection of the dead to make your mark on history now. Baptize your babies, and live in your baptismal grace, continuing to receive the gifts of Word and Sacrament throughout your entire life. Share Christ boldly because when we confess Christ, we don't know who's listening. We don't know who needs to hear what we have to say because likely in the crowd there are many others who are too afraid to speak up.

1. The Lord strengthens us to endure persecution.

**JESUS STRENGTHENS US TO CONFESS HIM IN GOOD TIMES AND BAD.** As we confess the truth about marriage, about what it means to be male and female, as we confess the truth about Jesus being the only savior of all mankind who gives us forgiveness, life, and salvation, there can't help but be the world being changed. As we consider the cost, no cost can be too high for the surpassing glory of Jesus who died that we may live.