

Pastor Joe Polzin
 2 Timothy 4:1-4
 “Be Ready to Confess Jesus”
 LWML Sunday
 October 1, 2017

(Adapted from the sermon written for LWML 2017, written by Rev. Dr. Lawrence R. Rast, Jr.)

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

2017 is really a rather amazing year. First off, of course, it is the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther’s posting of the 95 Theses, and the beginning of the Reformation. The whole world, you could say, is paying attention to Luther this year. 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, or 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, too, is a big deal!

Today, we’re talking about confessing the faith. And in the half millennium since the Reformation began, and in the 75 years since the LWML began, 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, for 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.

And 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.

To be proclaimers of the message of salvation is central to our identity as Christ’s people. This is what the Apostle Paul is talking about to Timothy, which we heard this morning:

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 Paul wrote these words to Timothy, he wrote to him as a fellow pastor, knowing full well the challenges that faced preachers of the Gospel in the time of the early church in the Roman empire.

But he also wrote to him knowing that Timothy had come to the faith because his mother and grandmother, who passed on the faith to him. Paul wrote, back in chapter 1: *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 lives, and in our spheres of influence. Proclaiming the salvation won by Jesus is not just “the pastor’s job.” Every single one of us is called to be ready to confess Christ, so that, when God opens those doors for us, we do just that.

The need for sharing Christ is as great 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 includes LCMS members) think there may be other ways to salvation outside of faith in Jesus, and we see that we *need* to be ready to confess the message of salvation by *grace* alone, through *faith* alone, because of *Christ* alone.

Listen again to how Paul assessed where people were in *his* day:

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).

This sounds like an accurate commentary on 2017, as well! But not only Paul's day, and not only 2017 – also 1517, which brings us back to Luther, and the Reformation. The proclamation of Christ was not sound in Luther's day. It was just as confused as it is today. 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, he was confronted by the question of righteousness: What does it mean to be right in God's eyes? And the Scriptures seemed to offer a difficult answer: keep God's law perfectly. However, Luther 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."

Luther reflected on this, and he realized quite shockingly, he *did* hate God. He hated the righteous God who punishes sinners, and he was angry with Him, even though he was sure this was blasphemous.

It wasn't until 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 perfectly for all—for Luther, for you, and for me.

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 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.

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 all the way 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're recalling 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 they have chosen a time more challenging than 1942? The world had been at war for three years, and the United States for one. 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 7th and 8th, 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 our mission efforts in amazingly powerful ways!

But there is more, as a LWML historian once put it:

"...the blessing of the LWML... 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."

We all know that "time marches on," and it seems that every year, it marches at the double quick. And the true confession of the Church has always battled against the forces that would like nothing better than to see it fall. 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 assurance of new life.

And the Lord has gathered faithful women, men, 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, starting first in our own lives, with those immediately around us. Simply put, our faithful God keeps His promises to His people. We pray that this Sunday, and every day of our lives, He will always enable us to be ready to confess Jesus. In his name.

And now may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord.