

What does it mean to be a Lutheran?

Reformation 2019 Romans 3:19-28 Pastor Robert Hein

Introduction: As we celebrate the Lutheran Reformation, **what does it mean to be a Lutheran?**

How would you explain that to an unchurched friend or neighbor?

Some humorous suggestions: internet is full of these lists...

You Know You Might Be A Lutheran If...

1. you only serve Jell-O in the proper liturgical color for the season of the church year
2. a midlife crisis means switching from the old hymnbook to the new one.
3. you think "hotdish" is one of the major food groups.
4. doughnuts are in the official church budget.
5. you're watching "Star Wars" in the theatre and when they say, "May the force be with you," you reply, "and also with you."
6. you tap a church visitor on the shoulder and say, "excuse me, but you're sitting in my seat."
7. you have an uncontrollable urge to sit in the back row of any room.

What does it really mean to be a Lutheran? What do we stand for? What are we passionate about? What do we want to share with others?

The name Lutheran comes from an important reformer of the church who lived about 500 years ago, **Martin Luther**. People who agreed with Martin Luther's teachings rather than Roman Catholic teachings were called Lutherans. At first, it was almost a term of disdain and derision. "Oh, you are those Lutherans, that cult that broke off the Holy Roman Church."

It's important to remember,

We don't worship Martin Luther –

We don't consider him to be the head of our church

We don't regard his writings to be superior to or even equal with the Bible, or as an alternate source of doctrine.

Luther was accused of being an innovator, coming up with all sort of weird new teachings.

But Luther didn't develop any new set of teachings.

Other religious leaders were innovators. – Joseph Smith introduced a whole new set of teachings in the Book of Mormon. Muhammed introduced a whole new set of teaching in the Koran. The Popes over the years introduced a whole new set of church teachings and traditions.

But Martin Luther was not an innovator. He was a Reformer.

When the church started to veer off course, he simply wanted to **return** the church to the truths of the Bible and the light of Scripture.

In other words, as Lutherans, our teachings don't go back 500 years to the time of Luther, they go back 2,000 years to the time of Christ. We believe and teach what Jesus taught and what Peter and Paul and the apostles

In fact, we proclaim what Moses and the prophets proclaimed already back in the Old Testament.

The Apostle Paul described the members of the Christian church this way

You are fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. **Ephesians 2:19-20**

That foundation is built solely upon the teachings of the Old and New Testament Bible and the head of that church is none other than Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior

In fact, Luther never wanted his followers to call themselves Lutherans, He said he much rather have us call ourselves Christians.

He said, I didn't die for. I can't save you. Christ died for you. Christ saved you. Call yourselves Christians
Chiefly that is what we are – we worship Christ and follow Christ and trust in Christ

And yet, since there are major differences between various Christian denominations, the term Lutheran can help people understand what we believe and teach from the Bible.

So our goal today as we celebrate the Lutheran Reformation, define what it means to be a Confessional Lutheran We will answer three key questions that set us apart.

- 1) **What is the authority for our teachings?**
- 2) **What do we proclaim about Jesus?**
- 3) **What do we teach about the way to heaven?**

- 1) **First of all, what is our authority?** What do you base your teachings upon?

There are many sacred books and sacred sources people regard as the authority for what they believe and how they live.

As I mentioned – Muslims follow the Koran and the prophet Muhammed. Mormons follow the Book of Mormon and the teachings of Joseph Smith and his successors. Others follow the teachings of the Pope or church tradition. For others, worldly philosophies, scientific theories and popular public opinion rule the day.

Shows like the View – panel of experts

Today, human reason seems to rule the day – every does what is right in his own eyes

Lutherans follow the Bible as a lamp for our feet and light for our path

Bible is not merely a book of human opinions and philosophies.

It is the verbally inspired Word of God.

2 Samuel 22:31 “Every word of God is flawless; he is a shield for all who take refuge in him.

Therefore, the Bible is God's absolute authority for all we believe and teach.

That was the shield Martin Luther relied upon when he was put on trial because of his Christian beliefs.

Luther stood trial before the most powerful man of the world at that time; King Charles V, leader of the Holy Roman Empire. Luther was expected to renounce all his teachings and come back under the control of the Roman Church.

But at this Diet in the city of Worms, Germany, Luther made his famous stand. AT the threat of excommunication, imprisonment and death, Luther boldly declared.

Unless I am convinced by Scripture that my teachings are in error, I cannot and I will not recant. I can do no other. Here I stand! God help me. Amen.

500 years later, we Lutherans still take our stand upon the truths of Holy Scripture.

Because we believe the Bible is God's Word, it is the source of all our teachings

When it comes to the origin of the universe, when it comes to the God pleasing practice of our sexuality, when it comes to determining right and wrong, setting priorities, God's Word offers the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

So often today, when there is a conflict between what the Bible says and what the world is promoting, people believe they need to compromise or change or ignore the Bible to make it agree with popular public opinion.

But we don't need to change the Bible. We need to change our attitude and viewpoint to agree with the Bible.

There is funny story that illustrates this point.

There was once a radio conversation between a US naval ship and Canadian authorities off the coast of Newfoundland.

The US Ship Captain said to the Canadian authority: Please divert your course 0.5 degrees to the south to avoid a collision.

The Canadian authority replied to the ship captain: Recommend that you divert your course 15 degrees to the South to avoid a collision.

The US Ship replied This is the Captain of a US Navy Ship. I say again, divert your course.

The Canadian authority replied: No. I say again, you divert YOUR course!

The US Ship captain replied: THIS IS A US AIRCRAFT CARRIER, A LARGE WARSHIP OF THE US NAVY. DIVERT YOUR COURSE NOW!!

The Canadian authority replied: **This is a lighthouse.** Your call.

Christian friends, God's Word is like that lighthouse- strong, firm and steadfast, unmovable. God's Word doesn't need to divert course to agree with our way of thinking and the ways of this sinful world. Rather we need to divert our course to line up with the truths of the Bible.

We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. **2 Corinthians 10:5**

Now we don't want to simply be Lutherans in name only. When you have to set priorities and make decisions, God's Word has to be the determining factor.

2 What do we believe about Jesus?

Some highly regard the Bible, but only as a rule book

A book of morals to be followed

Jesus, a perfect law giver.

No, the Bible is not a set of rules,. It's a love story

How God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believe him him shall not perish, bur have eternal life

It's about a rescue mission. – all that Jesus did and accomplished to rescue us from the guilt and curse and punishment of our sins, that we might be forgiven, set free, and set right with God.

The main purpose of the Bible is to point us to Jesus

John 20: 31 These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Jesus is not merely a good man or good example or new lawgiver

He is our Savior, our Substitute and the Son of God.

All of the Bible focuses on Jesus and his redemptive work.

The Bible reveals Jesus to us and his great blessings. The blessings he won for us on the cross – peace, forgiveness, new life, a home in heaven.

3 What is the way to heaven?

Natural way of thinking – earn my way to heaven, make up for my wrongs, live a good life and merit salvation

Many churches teach that also – you do it all yourself, or Jesus does his part and you finish the rest.

Even at Luther's time, the church spoke of Jesus' sacrifice, but that wasn't enough

But you still had to make temporal satisfaction for your sins, or finish the job by suffering in a place of suffering called purgatory

Early in his life, Luther struggled with guilt, doubt and uncertainty.

Early on, he acknowledged that he actually hated Christ, because he viewed him as this perfect lawgiver who demanded righteous living and perfection, and he couldn't measure up.

But then he discovered or rediscovered the fundamental truth of the Bible. We are saved, set right with God, not because of anything we have done, but because of God's mercy in Christ.

Text - Therefore, no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.²¹ But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ²² This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

Romans 3:20-24

It is foolish and futile to try and earn God's favor by our good deeds. God demands perfection, perfect obedience to God's law and we can't produce it. Paul wrote, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

What we could never do, Jesus did for us.

God credits Jesus' perfect life to our account

Righteousness – we have because of our good life and performance – doesn't measure up

Righteousness – We have in Christ, receive as a gift, covered in it

Jesus, your blood and righteousness, my beauty are, my glorious dress,

I am faultless to stand before the throne, clothed in the righteousness of Christ alone

Justified – declared not guilty, I don't justify myself by my performance

Justified freely by his grace through the redemption

All received through faith, and **even our faith is** a gift from God.

Then we have certainty, certainty of the truth, certainty of where we stand with God, certainty of where we will spend eternity, because it is all about Jesus!

Conclusion – Lutherans have silly quirks and quaint traditions, but what we want to really be known for, what we want to stand for, what we want to share with the world is the certainty we enjoy

We Lutherans are Christians, people who follow God's Word as the authority for all we believe and teach, who cherish Christ as our Savior, our Substitute and the Son of God and we treasure the free gifts of forgiveness freedom and eternal life he won for us on the cross. This is our Reformation heritage to cherish and to share with others!