

Rev. Luke C. Werre
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Pentecost 4

“The Presentation of the Augsburg Confession”

Matthew 10:32-29

THE COST OF CONFESSING CHRIST

So you claim to be a Christian. That’s going to cost you.

It cost dearly those who tacked their names to the bottom of the Lutheran creed called the Augsburg Confession. These were leaders of Christians who in their own words took “*most diligent care that no new and ungodly doctrine should creep into our churches.*” In this written document they clarified, according to Scripture, twenty eight specific points of doctrine in hopes of preserving Christian unity and perhaps even healing some of the ugly political divisions tearing apart the empire. Happily, His Imperial Majesty, Emperor Charles V granted it a formal hearing.

But it cost them. Only 16 years later, after Martin Luther’s death, the gates of hell burst open and spewed warfare all over their territories. Many of these same Christian dukes and princes, their families, faithful pastors and Lutheran Christians were slaughtered, shackled, exiled or forcibly robbed of the freedom to worship openly. The emperor’s political patience had run out.

What’s striking is the apparent eagerness and the boldness of these Lutheran underdogs at Augsburg. They were among the first to show up for the event. They were unbending against the pressure to compromise the truth. They were elated merely for the opportunity to be heard. In a letter to a friend, Martin Luther wrote, “*I am tremendously pleased to have lived to this moment when Christ, by his staunch confessors, has publicly been proclaimed in such a great assembly by means of this really most beautiful confession.*”

It was as if they did not care about the cost of confessing Christ. It was as if they were living examples of Christ’s description from Matthew 10 that we are considering today.

Maybe you’ve heard or read these words of Christ before, but they’ve always left you feeling unsettled. You didn’t want to look at them too closely: “*Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men I will disown him before my Father in heaven.*” So then is Christ acknowledging me, or disowning me? It scares me to ask.

Jesus says, “*Do not suppose that I have come to hurl peace onto the earth. I did not come to hurl peace, but a sword.*” And, oh by the way, I intend to use you to stir up the trouble, dear Christian.

Not that Christ wants us to be obnoxious. Rather the world is like an injured dog cowering in a corner. It doesn’t understand that you are reaching out to rescue it in love. It doesn’t know that it’s dying. It thinks it is defending its own life when it snarls and lashes out to tear at you. Even as you gently try to console it, you only upset it more. The dog would rather take your life than be threatened by your good intentions. It would be so much easier, so much safer, to leave it alone and let the dog die.

So we’ve often enough left the world alone, haven’t we? Because, frankly, it frightens us. Our hearts are pounding in our throats to pick up the telephone and call that who hasn’t been to church for a while, or knock on the door of that prospect, or bring up the topic to a racquetball partner or stand firmly but lovingly in the face of that person angrily confronting you on how your church handled something, or dreading the inevitable, indefinite awkwardness once you broach the subject of your Christian faith with a co-worker, with your date, or with the neighbors next door. And who wants the excruciating tension of “*a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law*” –a man’s enemies being “*the members of his own household?*” It’s easier to prefer keeping peace with father or mother or son or daughter than to rock the boat because of

something the Bible says. “They know where we stand on that issue,” we say to console ourselves, though by the way we act toward them you’d think we approve of their sin.

So, it’s not merely a matter of failing to confess but even pulling the opposite direction: we avoid, we put off, we resist, we recoil, we cringe. And when we do speak we flounder for what to say.

“O Lord, help me, I am a disaster! Far from being like the robust confessors at Augsburg. I already fail in the much less climactic tedium of day to day life. I have not had the heart to suffer the cost of confessing Christ. I have tried to save my life, even the little conveniences in it, rather than lose it. Will you now disown me before your Father in heaven? Will I perish for eternity?”

Dear Christian Friend, that is exactly why Christ has come in the first place. Even as He speaks He knows your failures, your inabilities. The one who wills you to take up your cross and follow Him has already taken up His cross for your sake long before. The One who *is* success became your failures and your weakness. He was disowned by His heavenly Father in place of you. His sufferings and death mean you are forgiven. Even as you take up your cross to follow Him don’t forget first each day to take up the sign of the cross drawn on your head and on your heart when you were baptized to mark you as a redeemed child of Christ. Redeemed. Bought. Owned. Someone Christ is not about to give up.

Now, by His forgiveness, Christ has given you a new lease on life, so to speak –or better yet, a new life that the world can’t take away. He’s given you a new defense against all your greatest fears of what it will cost you to confess Christ. You see, the cost of confessing Christ here on earth isn’t anything He Himself doesn’t supply –or better, replace in a much more marvelous way:

- Your temporary life here for eternal life
- The loss of people’s favorable opinion of you for eternal glory alongside His throne
- Your grief and exhaustion for eternal relief and joy

- Even your strained family relations for the company of saints and angels before His throne.

He truly makes it so that losing your life here on earth for Him is gaining your real life. He makes it so that what seems like a cost to us now will be nothing in comparison. He has paid the real cost.

Here in Matthew 10 Jesus was briefing the Twelve before He sent them out to preach. Christ reminded them, “Your worst enemies, satan included, can’t do anything to you nearly as bad as your heavenly Father could. But fortunately your heavenly Father only has just the opposite in mind. He cares about every hair on your head.” God’s promises to take care of us as we speak for Him prompt us to speak. Then Jesus adds, “*Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven.*” The faculty within the Lutheran elementary school where I serve often confers with each other over a single student – what are the best ways to nurture this child, to challenge him, to enable him to overcome obstacles and succeed. So Christ is speaks His concern for us to the heavenly Father as we confess Him.

Confessing Christ is not optional for a Christian. It will cost you too. But by your baptism Christ has already equipped you, supplied you, endowed you with everything that belongs to Himself. No price that you pay here on earth will touch that.