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Presentation of the Augsburg Confession

Psalm 119:45-47 – A Kingly Confession

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If there is an important date that the average Lutheran remembers in Reformation history, it is almost certainly October 31<sup>st</sup>, 1517. That's the date when we normally celebrate the Reformation together, the date when Luther nailed his 95 theses to the door of the castle church in Wittenberg. It's a triumphant date, but there's one that's more important.

Or maybe if you're a history buff you remember the date April 18<sup>th</sup>, 1521. Maybe even more important than the last in the grand scheme of things, this was the date when Luther stood tall against prince and pope at the Diet of Worms, refused to recant or be bullied by the traditions and authorities of men, and doubled down on his writings on the truth of God's Word and the Gospel of Jesus Christ. "*Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me. Amen.*"

Up to that point, there was still hope for reformation in the church in its truest sense – that there wouldn't have to be any breaks or divisions, but that the Roman Catholic Church would correct its course and center itself again on pure, true, Biblical Christianity. But unfortunately, that didn't happen, and the rifts that were forming a decade earlier broke open wide by 1530. In the years after the diet of Worms, Reformation teaching spread throughout Germany and even to other parts of Europe. As more and more opened their eyes to the errors and abuses of Roman Catholicism and fell in with Luther, Charles V, the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire – basically the secular arm of the Roman Catholic Church – began to oppose the Reformation that much more strongly. He had wars to fight, and he didn't need these divisions and distractions. In fact, Charles V even condemned Lutheran teaching in his lands and gave approval to a piece of Roman Catholic propaganda called the *404 Articles*, which smeared the Reformation by accusing it of virtually every heresy known to man. Well finally, Charles V got fed up enough with dealing with the Reformation that he called a diet – an official church meeting – in the German city of Augsburg so that the Reformers would have to stand before him and look him in the eye and answer for what they had said and done. No longer could they run or hide. He was going to put an end to this, once and for all.

Let's just say that didn't work out like he expected. See, the Reformers weren't running or hiding, and they jumped at the opportunity to share what they truly believed with the emperor and with the world. So on June 25<sup>th</sup>,

1530, the Reformers presented what remains to this day the essential statement of Lutheranism – the Augsburg Confession. As Rome tried to repress the Reformation, the Lutherans gave the floor to Dr. Christian Beyer, who belted out the Confession, it's said, with a voice powerful enough to fill not just their assembly hall but even the streets throughout the city. It was truly a Kingly Confession that was given to Charles V at Augsburg that day. But most importantly, it wasn't a confession *to* a king. It was a confession *of* a King – the King of heaven and earth, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ – because this was a confession that brings freedom to our souls, that is unashamed of the truth, and that is driven by love.

You can see those themes woven throughout the Augsburg Confession, and you can also see those same themes in our sermon text for today from Psalm 119. It's no surprise that this section of Psalm 119 became almost a rallying cry of support for the Augsburg Confession, because what was presented at Augsburg was firmly grounded in the truth of the Word to the glory of God and to the comfort of souls.

So the first theme Psalm 119 points to here is freedom: "*I will walk about in freedom, for I have sought out your precepts.*" Now at first, that might seem a little strange to us. Normally in America, we think of freedom as the *absence* of precepts, laws, rules – whatever you want to call them. Freedom is not having someone tell you what to do or say or think, right?

Well sometimes we get the same idea about spiritual things. Nowadays, it's common to see nondenominational churches that don't want to be boxed into a certain faith tradition. Or it's popular to base your faith on only a few general essentials, rather than the whole truth of God's Word. We tend to like our spiritual freedom just like our national freedom – we just want to be able to do our own thing without anybody getting in the way.

The problem is, spiritual freedom doesn't work that way. Apart from God's truth there can be no spiritual freedom, because apart from God's truth we can only ever be slaves to sin and the devil. That's why Jesus said in John 8, "*If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.*" Only by holding to God's Word can we know the truth about who God is and what he's done for us in Christ. Only by holding to God's Word can we know the truth that our salvation isn't about us and our works in any way – it can't be, because we are hopelessly sinful on our own. No, it's all about Jesus – by grace, through faith. And only by holding to God's Word can we know the truth about how to find this life's greatest blessings – not ones that restrict us or enslave us, but ones that set us

free and fulfill our lives as the people God made us and redeemed us to be! – as well as how to look forward with eager anticipation to eternal life in heavenly perfection. That’s why things like the Augsburg Confession are so important, because with every word we cling to true freedom for our souls and we scrap slavery to Satan and selfishness and man-made mandates as we seek God’s good truth for every aspect of our faith and life.

And with Dr. Beyer, that’s not something to be ashamed of; that’s something to shout from the rooftops! It’s just like Psalm 119 says, “*I will speak of your statutes before kings and will not be put to shame.*” No, maybe the Augsburg Confession isn’t the kind of thing you hear a lot of nowadays. It’s uncommon enough for people in this day and age to stand for much of anything, and if they do stand for something, it almost certainly isn’t what God says is good and right and true (just look at the news, especially this month!). But that’s what makes a strong, solid confession like this what the world so desperately needs. Just as it happened with Charles V, so also it happened many times before then and many times since then that Christians have been made to look like fools to the world for what they believe. But the fact is, only what we believe from God’s Word gives us a rock-solid foundation that stands the test of time, even when science and philosophy and popular culture can’t; and only what we believe from God’s Word can bring true, lasting peace and joy to our lives, unlike any other empty pleasures this world could ever offer. Yes, no matter how low and meager we might seem to the high and mighty of this world, we have something all the earth’s riches could never hope to buy: the assurance of forgiveness and eternal salvation in Christ alone, and the promise that as we confess him faithfully – just as our Gospel lesson said for today – our Savior will never let us be put to shame: “*Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven.*”

No, the Augsburg Confession – this public statement of what we believe about the truth of God’s Word – isn’t something to be ashamed of; it’s something to be proud of! It’s just like when you get married. When you get married, you want the whole world to know how great your spouse is and how much you love them. Those things go hand-in-hand in marriage – and they also go hand-in-hand when it comes to our relationship with God and confessing our Christian faith. Again, it’s just like Psalm 119 says: “*I delight in your commands because I love them.*” So what’s there to love about God’s commands? What’s there to love about faithfully and fully confessing God’s Word? Well, it all goes back to the two main focal points of true Christian doctrine: the glory of God and the comfort of souls. Because our God loved us so much, he sent us a Savior and revealed himself and his Will to us in his

Word. And because we love God in return, because we are so thankful for everything he’s told us and done for us, we want to give him the glory he deserves. So that means proclaiming everything he says and does and wants to the world! That means *confessing* his Word faithfully and *living* his Word faithfully!

See, ours is a confession that is driven by love – not only God’s love for us and not only our love for God, but also our Christian love for the people around us. It’s just like the Apostle John says in his first letter: “*This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. This is love for God: to obey his commands*” (1 John 5:2-3). See, if we believe (as the Bible teaches) that all people are sinful and need a Savior; that Christ alone saves us from our sins by his perfect life, sacrificial death, and glorious resurrection; and that only through God’s Word can we come to faith in Christ, knowledge of the truth, and hope for eternal salvation, then how can we not share God’s love with those around us so that more and more can come with us to heaven one day? The world might try to convince us nowadays that statements of faith like the Augsburg Confession are too old-fashioned and stuffy and restrictive and unsympathetic, even *unloving* to those who think differently. But the truth is, if we’re not keeping our whole focus on God, his Word, and his salvation – whether that means our focus goes to us, to things, to false gods, whatever – anything else can only ever lead to uncertainty. There’s no comfort there; there’s only guilt and doubt. No, actually nothing could be *more* loving than for us to clearly and fully share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with the world around us like we do in the Augsburg Confession, because only then can we come to a unity of faith that rightly glorifies God and a common hope that truly comforts our souls with the assurance of forgiveness in Christ and the promise of life in heaven.

So what’s the most important date in the history of the Reformation? It’s not October 31<sup>st</sup> or April 18<sup>th</sup>, as important as they were. It’s June 25<sup>th</sup>, 1530 – the Presentation of the Augsburg Confession, the true birthday of the Lutheran Church. What Dr. Beyer boomed for all to hear on that day still echoes for us on this day as we continue to confess with the Reformers the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth of God’s Word. And when *we* are blessed with an opportunity to stand up for the true God and our Savior Jesus Christ in our lives, may ours, too, be a confession worthy of our King so that it may be said of us just as it was at Augsburg: “*Most gracious Emperor, this is a confession that will even prevail against the gates of hell, with the grace and help of God.*” God grant it, for his glory and for the comfort of our souls. Amen.