

Dear members and friends of St. John,

Many who grew up Lutheran imagine that **all Protestant churches are basically alike**. Yes, we all confess Jesus Christ as Savior. Yes, we all acknowledge God to be triune – three persons and yet only one God. But there's much more to our faith than these basic tenants. In fact, the **real practice of our faith** – where you might say “the rubber meets the road” – shows up in the drastic differences between **our doctrine** (our set of beliefs that frame our practice) and **the other Protestant churches**.

For insight on this, I have inserted the following text from the book, *"Authentic Christianity – How Lutheran Theology Speaks to a Postmodern World,"* by authors Gene Veith, Jr. and Trevor Sutton (St. Louis: CPH, c. 2017):

When Lutheran immigrants came to the United States from Germany, Scandinavia, and Eastern Europe, they sometimes received a chilly and perplexed reception from American Protestants. Sabbath-keeping was a major emphasis in nineteenth century Protestantism, and here these Lutherans, after going to church on Sunday mornings, would go to their beer gardens! They would listen to concerts! They would watch and play sports! And then on Christmas, they would decorate evergreen trees in their homes and even churches, like Druid tree worshippers! Are these people even Christians?

It soon became evident that these immigrants had an impressive vocation-inspired work ethic and a devout reliance on the Bible and the Gospel, but they seemed freer in their attitudes about recreation, aesthetics, and behaviors such as smoking and drinking than most American Protestants of their day. After all, Lutherans never had a Puritan tradition. They did have their Pietists [a Christian movement in the 1800's to find God inside oneself through feelings and emotions, and to follow an inner discipline to end sin; e.g. Big Tent Revivals], who sometimes rejected such worldly pursuits, but only as an individual discipline, rather than a social mandate. A major conflict between Lutheranism and American Protestantism came with the Prohibition Movement (1919-1933) with Lutherans and Catholics being perhaps the only religious groups to strenuously oppose the banning of alcohol.

Still today Lutherans tend to be quite different from the “handle not, taste not, touch not” (see Col. 2:21) school of Christianity. They seldom belabor the kind of music they should listen to or whether they should patronize only “Christian” businesses. Their doctrines of vocation and the two kingdoms teach them that God is hidden in the world, just as He is revealed in the Church, so they see a

Christian dimension even in the realms that are generally considered secular. More important, Lutherans believe that their relationship to God is based not on their works, but in His grace; that is, in the forgiveness of their sins through Christ. Grace brings an end to endless self-scrutiny [Pietism], parsing God's Law [Legalism], and being obsessed with perfecting our own righteousness [Methodism and Pietism].

Now this does not mean that Lutherans are indifferent to the danger of sin and the importance of doing good works. ..But in light of the Gospel, good works can be performed in a spirit of freedom. **[Pages 199-200, bracketed portions by Pastor Travis].**

If you've ever wondered why Lutherans make such a big deal about Reformation Sunday (observed as the last Sunday in October), it's because of the **freedom of the Christian** - all coming out of the Reformation in the 1500's! Christ's atoning work frees us from the eternal consequences of our sin! Christ has fulfilled the Law of God completely for us! Notice how the other Protestant churches hardly recognize the Reformation. It's because they still, in one form or another, cling to the idea that the Law is the center of a Christian's life and daily practice.

Lutherans say, "No!" The freeing Gospel is at the center! The Law doesn't motivate the Christian to "do good" or "clean-up one's act." For no one is capable of ending sin in their life by their efforts to keep the Law. **Gratitude for what Jesus has done for us - a gratitude that leads to a heart-felt desire to please our Lord – that is what motivates us!**

And yes, God is in control of not only His Church, but the kingdoms and principalities of this world. He puts leaders in their places, and removes others. He raises up businesses and corporations, and allows others to fail. We don't have to find that "Christian run" business to frequent, but only the best business or institution for our needs. God is in control of the Kingdom of Grace (His Church on earth) and the Kingdom of Power (His control of the world). Sure, we avoid doing business with companies that are openly hostile to Christianity and Christian values, but we don't have to worry about God condemning us for not patronizing only "Christian owned" businesses! That's part of the freedom of being Christian.

To live in the state of Grace (of which we find ourselves in Christ) **will be a challenge.** Other Christians will look down on us for not acting pious enough. But we have the truth, and the Truth has set us free (John 8:31-36)!

Pastor Travis