

“Truth, love and confession” Mat 10:26-33

So have no fear of them, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops. And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows. So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.

Today we celebrate the birthday of Lutheran church. Our church is turning 486! Our Lutheran church is unique. It's birthday was unique. It was born by doing exactly what we today heard as an encouragement from Jesus. Acknowledging Jesus before men, and confessing the truth before hostile powers of this world.

There are many different churches in this world. Some are defined by territory. Some by nationality. Some by their structures, or traditions, and so on. There is only one that came into being confessing the truth of the Gospel. That is – Lutheran church, our church.

Our church was born confessing before the highest powers in Roman empire that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, lived, died and rose again so that sins of every human creature could be freely forgiven, so that anyone, whatever unworthy they are, could receive God's undeserved grace and imperishable inheritance with Jesus. And all of this without any merit from our side. As a pure gift of God.

Now it is our church, and now it is our time to confess the truth of the Gospel before the hostile world. What exactly does it mean 'to confess'? In our reading we actually heard the word 'acknowledge'.

We could explain the word 'confess' as speaking, sharing, acknowledging, stating the truth that we have received from the Triune God in His Word, the Bible, and also living according to this truth.

It is not that much about arguing that we are right, it is more about being messengers of the Lord Jesus and faithfully delivering the message that He has entrusted to us. Thus says the Lord! Receive the message from Jesus Christ!

As we'll reflect on our today's reading, there are two things we'll consider in particular. Fearing and confessing. Jesus says it repeatedly, – do not fear this world! Do not fear them! Do not fear! We need to hear this, we really do.

Why? Because we do fear people and this world, and because we live in times when the world around us deliberately tries to make us to fear them. Hoping that we'll stop confessing the truth of Jesus Christ. How does it happen?

First, the world tries to silence the message about Jesus Christ. I mean to silence it completely. How? There are different tactics. One is to continually remind us: "Do not impose your religion on others!"

"Keep your religion to yourself! Don't bring it in public!" I assume you all have heard this one, in one form or in another. Then there are more aggressive tactics. In some of them Christians are looked upon with pity – 'poor religious people, they still live in the middle ages, with all their superstition.'

Or Christians can be openly ridiculed as stupid, narrow, hateful bigots, who do not belong to this world anymore. "And if you want to be accepted by us, then stop this religious nonsense!" And I assume you would have heard these as well.

And then we fear people. We want to be accepted. We don't want to be looked upon as idiots or haters, we don't want to be rejected because of what we know to be true. We fear and we stop confessing the truth. We become silent... out of fear; what will other think about us...

There is one clear goal behind all of this. To silence the truth. To silence the messengers of God's truth. Why? Remember what Paul the apostle wrote in his letter to Romans. "Faith comes from hearing." What would happen if we stopped sharing the Gospel, confessing the truth?

The people around us then would be denied of any hope of salvation. If there is no one who shares the Gospel, there is no way people can hear about Jesus and there is no way, they can be saved. This is why we have these attacks on us.

There is something else. Satan wants to believe that people who are hostile to the Gospel are our enemies. These are lies. They are not. In fact they are Satan's captives, in desperate need to be liberated.

Yes, they may act as our enemies, ridiculing and mocking God's messengers, but we need to be clear, they are not our enemies, they are exactly the people God has sent us to save. Therefore we have clear guidelines from Jesus about what to do.

"But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you!" (Mat 5:44). That's it. We need to pray for them so that they could be rescued from under the spell of the evil one and brought into the Kingdom of God's Son.

Second message that is being silenced is about God's design for our lives. About who we are and for what kind of live we are created. The world rebels and rages against the Creator. 'We want to be like gods ourselves. We'll define who we are.'

Today we can witness this blind rage especially when it comes to the questions about our very humanity, to questions regarding the wonderful institution of marriage, questions regarding God's wonderful gift of sexuality.

Satan wants to destroy everything that is pure and beautiful and sacred, everything that is given to us for our enjoyment and blessing. He wants to take the precious gifts of God and to trample them down in mud of promiscuity.

Leaving everyone in the midst of brokenness, emptiness, misery and pain. Why would Satan do this? Because marriage is the most important institution for human flourishing. And it is a closest analogy to our relationships with our God.

If you destroy marriage, you will destroy not only society, but also the Church. This is why Satan doesn't spare his energy attacking this wonderful gift of God and everyone who desires to protect it.

Again he applies the same tactics. Anyone who stands against him, is ridiculed, mocked, humiliated, called names – hypocrites, haters, bigots. All who disagree with these destructive lies, are threatened, sued, intimidated.

And we begin to fear. We stop confessing the truth. We become silent. We fear people and don't want to suffer ridicule and rejection. Don't be afraid! Don't be blinded by lies! You see, all means are allowed to destroy the opposition, and we are the opposition.

If we fear and become silent, the evil one wins. If we do not confess in winsome and loving way the truth about the most important relationships for human flourishing, the evil one wins, and so many will suffer.

And again, Satan wants us to perceive those who rage against God's wonderful design as our enemies. Sure, they often act as our enemies, as enemies of humanity, they breathe hatred and death, they call us enemies, and it hurts, and it can make us to fear them.

But remember, they are not our enemies. They are people for whom Jesus Christ gave up His life, so that they could live. They are sinners like we all. In desperate need for God's transforming grace.

They need our prayers, they need to hear the truth in winsome and loving way and they need to experience the love of Jesus. The same way as we experience Jesus' love and rejoice in His forgiveness every time when we come in His presence.

The third thing that Satan tries to silence and stop is our acts of love and forgiveness. We all tend to mess things up. Even with the closest people in our lives. Even to the extent that our relationships are broken.

What do we do then? Satan tells us – hold your ground, don't give up, there was such an injustice done to you, don't humiliate yourself by trying to restore what was

broken, don't show your weakness by asking for forgiveness, justice is on your side, let the other person repent first, and so on.

Again, I assume most of us would have experienced something like that, in our own lives as well. This is not God's voice. This is not Jesus speaking, this is the evil one trying to prevent the restoration of what is broken.

We fear people more than God. We fear to be perceived as weak, to appear as losers, or strange, we fear to be ashamed. And we don't live out what our Lord has called us to do: "Love your neighbour as yourself, consider others as more important than yourself, forgive not just seven, but seventy seven times."

For, in fact, this is true strength and courage when we make first step, when we repent, when we ask for forgiveness or offer forgiveness and peace even if we are not asked for it, when we go to those who don't deserve it, as Jesus came to us.

Do not fear! Do not fear! Do not fear even those who can kill the body! Three times Jesus says not to fear the world. But instead – fear the One who can kill both the body and the soul. Fear the One who is in control not only here, but also in eternity. Fear your God more than anyone else.

Remember, Luther begins the explanation of the Ten Commandments with 'fear and love the Lord you God'. What does this mean – fear you God? How can one fear and love someone at the same time?

Actually it is quite simple. Just think about someone who is really important to you. Whose opinion about you is really important to you; you really care what this person thinks of you, and of your actions, you want them to think well of you.

It may be a spouse, or parents, or friends, or somebody else, in whose eyes you really want to look as good as you possible can. You would do whatever is possible to impress this person. This is what 'fear your God' means.

Your God, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit should be this person No 1. Whoever else's view is important to you, whoever else's approval and acceptance you desire, you should first strive to have it from your God.

You should fear that you could disappoint Him. You should fear that you could do something that will show you in a bad light. You should fear that you could do things that He disapproves, you should fear losing His favour. You should fear not confessing His truth. This is what 'to fear God' means.

Why should we fear our God the most? Because He is the One who loves you the most. And He loves you first. He is your Creator, every minute we literally live from His grace. He cares for you, He watches over you, as Jesus said, even the hairs of your heads are all numbered.

He is God who not only provides your daily bread, He is God who gave up His life for you. He did it confessing the truth that He was the Son of God, who came to save you from sin, death and devil. This confession cost Him His life.

And with His death and resurrection He has opened the doors for you to come in the Father's presence. Through Him and thanks to Him every human being is invited to receive the forgiveness of all their sins and eternal life in Jesus name.

This is why you need to fear our Lord and Saviour. He is the One who loves you the most, who does for you the most, and who will decide your eternal destiny. Don't fear anyone or anything else, for if you have Jesus, you have everything you may ever need.

Does this mean that if we fear and love our Lord more than anything, we will be spared of all problems, suffering and hardship? Does it mean that there will be no more ridicule and mocking?

Not at all. This is what faithful Christians have always encountered, and this is what you will encounter if you remain faithful to our Lord and keep confessing His truth. This is a part and parcel of being a Christian.

This is what we are called to do. Do not fear! Confess the truth and suffer because of our confession. Sounds like fun, right? It isn't, sometimes it may be really hard. But, this is what we are called to do, and this is what we are to expect.

When you try to bring someone to Christ, be honest, tell them that being a Christian means to confess Jesus and to suffer because of that. And then, to rejoice that we are found worthy to suffer for His name's sake, exactly as the apostles did.

For when you are attacked because of the Gospel, you know that you are indeed in mission with your Risen Lord. Then you can take heart knowing that Jesus is with you and you'll soon be where He is.

Remember, if we confess that Jesus is the Lord and Saviour of the world, if we keep sharing His message, if we love people as Jesus loved them, even if we do it in our imperfect, mistaken and clumsy ways, Jesus Christ will acknowledge us before the Father.

It means that when we'll stand before God's throne on the Last Day, Jesus will say: "These are my people, my brothers and sisters, they are with me."

We are Lutherans, we are heirs of the Church of the Reformation, of men and women who confessed their faith before the hostile world, even risking their lives, and now it is our turn. May the Holy Spirit help us to remain faithful, so that we can hear the sweetest of words from our Saviour: "I acknowledge - you are mine!"

Amen.