

## **“Lord, renew our mind!” Romans 12:1-3**

**I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.**

**Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.**

**For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.**

Today we celebrate the birthday of the Lutheran Church. On 25<sup>th</sup> of June in year 1530 AD a group of faithful men stood before the emperor Charles V in the city of Augsburg and confessed, and didn't deny, but confessed, risking with their own life, the truth of the Gospel and their allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Out of this act of confessing, the Lutheran Church was born. As confessing church, as the church that is not ashamed to acknowledge the name of Jesus before the world, as the church that doesn't compromise on the truth of the Gospel even before the powerful of this world.

This is how our church was born. By the power of the Word and the Spirit. Where are we today? What does the Lutheran church in the world look like today? What would our forefather say if they saw what has happened to the Lutheran church today?

There are many reasons to rejoice. It has grown, and it has spread across the globe. The largest Lutheran churches now are in Africa. Many of these new and growing church bodies are hungry for the Gospel.

Young and old alike are thirsty for the Good News, congregations spring up faster than pastors can be trained. There is deep appreciation of the Gospel and passionate desire to study the Word of God. They want to be Christians.

Like back in 1530 also today there are many Lutheran churches that stand firm against the powers of this world, do not conform to the world, and don't compromise on the words of eternal life. And often they suffer for their faithfulness. There are, indeed, many reasons to rejoice.

But this is not the whole story. There are also very different groups of people who still insist on calling themselves Lutherans. Churches that not only conform to the world but want to be even worldlier than the world itself.

Churches that not only are indifferent to God's gift of marriage, but that also attack it in many ways actively promoting all sorts of sexual promiscuity.

Churches that remove crosses not to offend those who hold different beliefs.

Churches that ordain practicing homosexuals in their highest offices. Churches whose leaders are not sure which way is better, Jesus or Muhammed. Churches

that remove the name of the Triune God from their liturgies and language, just to become more inclusive. It is hard even to share this.

What about us? What would our forefathers in faith, who were ready to lose their lives protecting the pure teaching of the Gospel, what would they say about our Lutheran church? What do you think?

Are we faithful to the Scriptures, are we faithful to the Lutheran Confessions? Are we ready to confess the truth of the Gospel even if it may cost us something? The sad reality is that we have conformed to the world. It has happened gradually, most of us haven't even noticed it.

I will try to explain what has happened and how we have conformed to the world. This is very important. Because if we don't understand what is wrong with us, we can't even renew our mind, and there is no hope that we could turn things around. Let's start from the beginning.

Every society needs an external framework that helps people to live together. That framework tells what is right and what is wrong, what is good and what is evil. The Western civilization came into being thanks to one specific framework, that is, the Christian.

The Bible, the Word of God gave us this framework. To have such a framework means that when you grow up you learn it and it determines how you live your life, how you relate to others, how we coexist as a society.

Having such framework keeps us accountable, and if someone acts contrary to it, we can correct them, admonish them and to restore them back into community. It is clear so far?

Now, during the last two hundred years Western society have done a lot to get rid of this Christian framework. And as we know, they have succeeded. In our society it is gone.

Even more, the very idea that there could exist such external framework has been rejected. They say, there is no objective right and wrong. Now, if there are no criteria outside of us that determine what is right and wrong, good and evil, who is left as a measure of all things?

Yes, me! Every individual. The main criterion then becomes, – can you guess? “How do you feel about this?” Not even what you think, but how do you feel. If you feel good about something, then it must be good. If you feel bad about it, then it must be bad.

Now, if this is how we evaluate things, then how do we relate to one another? Remember, there is no more external framework for good and evil. You can't anymore evaluate any action of anyone as right or wrong, for we as society have agreed that there is no right and wrong. It means that the main principle in our relationships becomes, – don't judge! How could you even tell if anyone is

doing something wrong, if there are no external framework. You can't. Then the main guideline for human interaction becomes – to make people feel good.

Then one of the greatest crimes that anyone can commit in such society is – to try to evaluate someone's actions as right or wrong and to try to guide them to what is right and good, and thus to make them feel bad or offended.

This is the unforgivable sin of today. It is like in the days of Judges, when everyone did what was right in their own eyes. But today we have done more, by introducing 'don't judge' we have created a system that not only promotes the idea that you can do whatever feels good for you, but also protects this self-centeredness by condemning anyone who dares still think or speak about what is right and what is wrong.

Are you still with me? Does this correspond to what we see in our society? As I said this is very important that we understand how this works. If you want to rethink it, you can get a copy of a sermon at the Hub or read it online on PastorsBlog.com.au, and I am happy to discuss it afterwards.

What I will say now I say with great sadness. This far we have been talking about the society. But the truth is that the same way of thinking and acting has become dominant in our church as well.

Test yourself, when was the last time when you gently spoke the truth in love to your brother or sister in Christ admonishing them to turn away from their sins, to receive forgiveness and restoration in God's family? And if you did, when was the last time anyone listened to you?

It seems we are fine to watch our members to sin and stray away from Christ, to wander away from God's family and eternal life, as long, as they ... feel good. We just don't want to offend them.

Why would we try to stop someone who is comfortably walking into eternal death? No, we want to be loving and caring. We don't want them to feel bad. The truth is, that nothing can be less loving and less caring than to see your brothers or sisters endangering their salvation and not warning them.

How often have we had conversations, when someone says: "I am concerned about our brother, or our sister in Christ, they sin and are straying away from Jesus, what could we do, how could we help them?"

Or it is rather: "If they feel so, let them be". Just don't say anything that may possibly offend them. Is that a loving attitude? What I hear from time to time is that something that our pastor said ... offended someone. What a terrible pastor!

I have been told that by inviting someone in God's presence to receive His gifts I have stood between them and Jesus. I have been told that people don't need to listen to God or to receive the Holy Spirit to be good Christians.

I have been told that if someone feels like they are Christians that's enough for their salvation. And this embarrassing list goes on. Have you heard anyone asking those who walk around complaining:

“Did our pastor said or did something contrary to what the Bible and our Confessions teach? Did he say something contrary to what he is called and promised to preach and teach?” Think about this...

In all these situations, we can see one pattern. We don't try to please God, we try to please people. Even considering our future we don't ask so much, what would please our Lord, more often we ask, how could we please people.

So often it seems that we don't believe there is right and wrong. We don't believe that we would need to live according to what is right in God's eyes and encourage and help others to do the same.

It seems we don't believe that sin separates people from Jesus and leads them into eternal condemnation. We don't believe in the power of God's Word and the Holy Spirit. We don't believe that if we speak the message that we are sent to speak it will achieve anything.

But we do believe that if we don't judge and don't offend anyone, that's enough to bring people to Jesus. And how is that going? We are ready to protect those who sin, and at the same time turn against those who try to bring them to Christ.

We have conformed to the world more than we realize. And we do it in the name of love and compassion. It is sad, it is very sad. The game would be over for us, if we didn't have the Word that helps us to renew our minds, but by the grace of God we still have it.

The Word of God gives us the framework. God's own framework. It is true, and beautiful and a great blessing to anyone who lives accordingly. The Word of God also give us power, God's own power. We don't even realize what a great power is entrusted to us.

When you speak the truth, the message of Jesus, both the law that shows our sin and the Gospel, that shows our Savior, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of life goes forth and works with the hearts of those who hear this message. If we don't, nothing happens.

When you witness about Jesus, it is not simply you speaking, it is the Triune God speaking through you. And we have His promise. Hear it once more: “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.” (Isa 55:10-11)

To us Jesus have entrusted the Word of life. He Himself invites us to listen to them and be transformed by the renewal of our mind, so that by testing we may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

See, He gives us His Word as the framework against which we can test everything and discern what is good and acceptable. He commands us to learn it. Learn everything that Jesus has taught. And as we do it, He sends His Spirit into our hearts.

This is how we become His disciples. And Jesus has promised, and He does bestow so many blessings on those who are faithful to Him. When I was in Seminary in Latvia our principal kept reminding us these words of Jesus.

“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.” (Mat 10:32-33)

These words may make us feel bad. Or even offended. But it is Jesus who says them. It is the same Jesus who gave up His life to save you. He cares about you more than anyone else. He says these words with true compassion and care, speaking the truth in love.

He wants to have you with Him, and He knows that not everyone will make it. This is, why He admonishes us to be serious about our salvation, and about the salvation of others. Be concerned about their salvation, not about their feelings.

And Jesus Himself is still here, speaking to us, helping us to renew our minds and to think with sober judgment. I don't know what the future will bring. If we repent and renew our minds by the Word and the Spirit, the Lord may choose to bless us.

If we keep asking how we could please our God, He may choose to bring people to Jesus through our congregation. If we continue to conform to the world, we will go the way of destruction, the same as the churches that I told you about earlier.

As we consider what kind of congregation we want to be, my prayer is that we are a congregation that strives not to conform to the world, that is passionate about renewing our minds through the Word and is bold to acknowledge Jesus before the world. Then our confession, similarly as the confession of our forefathers five centuries ago, will endure and will bear much fruit.

Happy birthday, Brothers and Sisters!

Amen.