

“Jesus, Augsburg and Barossa in 21st century.” Mt 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.”

Our sermon for today is entitled “Jesus, Augsburg and Barossa in 21st century”. What do you think, what connects these three? How are they related? I hope that shortly we will be able to find the answers.

So, where are we today? Here, in Barossa. That’s right. In the 21st century. And what do we remember today? Strangely enough, we have come here to remember the event that took place 489 years ago, in a place far, far away from here. In the city of Augsburg, in Germany. Or we could say that we have come here to remember the manifestation of God’s power five centuries ago.

What happened in Augsburg? The Gospel rediscovered by Luther was spreading like a bush fire. More and more people gladly embraced the Good News of freedom in Christ, fleeing from the captivity to human traditions and false teachings in the Roman church.

Emperor of the Holy Roman empire Charles V at that time was fighting against the armies of Turks. He needed all the help he could gather, and he wasn’t impressed at all hearing that religious arguments were dividing his subjects. He wanted to resolve this inconvenient religious–political situation.

He called for the imperial meeting that had to take place in the city of Augsburg, where the leaders of the evangelical side, those who had embraced the pure teaching of the Gospel, as rediscovered by Luther, had to give an account before the emperor for the faith that they held so dear.

Thus, on 25th of June, 1530 the confession of faith held by the evangelical side, which we know as Augsburg Confession, and which is one of the foundational documents for our church as well, this confession was read before the emperor by the chancellor of Saxony Christian Beyer. When the reading of the Augsburg Confession was finished several dukes and princes, risking not only with their status, but with their lives, confessed before the emperor that this is the Gospel

message that they believe the Scripture clearly teaches and that they wouldn't change their views. On this day, because of this bold public confession before the highest temporary authority of the emperor Charles V, something unique had happened. People who made this confession didn't even realize it yet, nor was it their intention.

But as we can see, there was the power of the Holy Spirit at work. From this brave act of confessing the truth of the Gospel as revealed to us in the Bible, a new church was born. Confessing church. The church where faithful men and women were ready to sacrifice everything, even their lives, so that only they could protect the pure teaching of the life-giving Gospel message.

Only later the enemies of the Gospel mockingly named this church - Lutheran church. That's how the Lutheran church was born. Boldly confessing the truth of the Gospel. Courageously standing before those who threatened to take their lives.

Trusting the Lord more than fearing the earthly consequences of this confession. Remaining faithful even in that situation where humanly speaking it would have seemed reasonable and much safer to give it in to the pressure and to keep silent.

And if our forefathers on that day had kept silent, the history of the Church and of the world would be very different. And we wouldn't be here. As wouldn't 80+ millions of Lutherans worldwide and hundreds of millions of evangelical Christians all around the world, whose churches were born inspired by what happened on this very day in Augsburg.

And it's interesting, what Bible passage do we have assigned for today? Jesus' own words which He spoke to His disciples sending them out with the Gospel message. We only read the middle section of what Jesus said. But there is more and what Jesus says may not be the most pleasant thing for our ears.

This is how Jesus encourages His disciples. "Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles. ... and you will be hated by all for my name's sake.

... have no fear of them... 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. ... 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. ... Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword."

Now we can start seeing the connection between Jesus and what happened in Augsburg and generally during the time of Reformation. As Jesus had warned, there were plenty of reasons to fear.

The world hates the Gospel message. As Jesus had foretold, those who wanted to confess the truth of the Gospel, were dragged before the kings. We know that it happened with the apostles. Just think about Peter or John, or Paul.

Luther was brought before the emperor in 1521 only because He wanted everyone to know about the gracious and merciful God. He was demanded to reject the Gospel. But by God's grace in the power of the Holy Spirit Luther chose to fear God more than men. As the result of his confession, he would have been killed, but his duke Frederick the Wise arranged his rescue mission.

In Augsburg on this very day the dukes and princes were brought before the emperor because they wanted everyone to be saved by the God of grace and to come to the knowledge of truth in Jesus Christ. They could have lost their lives, just as Jesus foretold, but they were emboldened by the Holy Spirit not to fear those who can kill the body, but to fear God.

They took seriously Jesus' words: "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." We should take them seriously too.

There is something marvellous about following Jesus and confessing Him before the world. Sure, we fear. It is inevitable. We fear facing rejection, mocking, hostility. The apostles feared as well, as did the early disciples.

Paul lists all the dangers he had faced because of the Gospel. That's scary just to read about it. Luther feared, when he, a simple professor from a little university, was called to confess his faith before the hostile emperor and the representatives of the pope's himself.

The dukes and princes feared standing before the emperor in Augsburg, for they didn't know what the consequences of their confession may be for them and for the people they represented. Just as Jesus foretold. But the Holy Spirit helped them.

But... someone may ask, what is so marvellous about all these scary situations? You see, nowhere in the Bible has God promised that He will protect us from all the unpleasant situations or even dangers that may face those who faithfully confess God's truth. He hasn't promised that we will always enjoy the harmony and peace and welcome everywhere we try to share the Gospel.

The very opposite is true. The Gospel will bring division, for the world hates it. It may and it does bring division even in the closest relationships. It divides families. That's the reality that many of us have experience in our own lives. But what Jesus has promised is that He will be with us. That the Holy Spirit will speak through us. That in our weakness His power will be mightily revealed.

Think about every time in history, when faithful Christians boldly confessed the Gospel of Jesus Christ, think about Augsburg, – when such confessions are made, often there is hostility, and not too often we can see immediate fruits.

But! That is in moments like these, when the power of the Holy Spirit manifests and the ripple effect of such confession goes far beyond what we can imagine. What happened in Augsburg, literary changed the course of history.

That's the connection between Jesus and Augsburg.

But what about us, Barossa in 21st century? We want it or not, but we have received this undeserved privilege to be brought to Christ in the same church that was born with the help of the Holy Spirit in Augsburg.

We are descendants of those brave Christians who cherished the confession of Jesus more that their own lives and well-being. What does this mean for us? We too live in this society that is exceedingly hostile to the Gospel. We too hear loud voices demanding Christians to keep quiet and not to speak the truth of God.

Not to speak about Jesus. Not to speak about God's good design for His human creatures. Not to call to repentance. Not to proclaim the excellences of our God. Keep your faith to yourself! It is not easy to resist those voices. And we fear...

More, how often we hear shushing voices in the church, that tell that us not to worry about the pure teaching of the Gospel, for we all believe in the same God, don't we? Just be nice. What does it matter that we have some differences?

Sure, what could it possibly matter if there are false teachings that misrepresent who God is, that separate people from Jesus by endorsing sinful behaviours, that deny power of God and lead people astray?! Such sweet talks don't testify about enlightenment and superior knowledge, but about ignorance and foolishness, or maybe sloth or apathy.

Too often we hear voices that demand us not to say anything that may offend anyone. Withhold the truth, deny Jesus, that's fine, just don't offend anyone! As if our false niceness could save anyone. This is not an easy time for the Church. And we fear... But we can take great encouragement that we are heirs of the Lutheran reformers.

The Holy Spirit has worked mightily through Lutheran church. Still does. And that is our privilege and responsibility not only to learn and to preserve the Gospel as we have received it so beautifully and clearly from our forefather, but also to confess it boldly, to share it with this dying world so that the power of the Spirit is released to do its work.

This is our connection to Jesus and to Augsburg. What Jesus said still stands. What He promised is as true today as ever, and the Holy Spirit, who accompanied all the heroes of faith throughout the ages, is still with us, right here.

This evening, when you leave, remember our glorious Lord, and what He has done for you despite all the hostility that He had to endure, remember our glorious past, our forefathers, their courage. And remember our glorious mission, – in the power of the Holy Spirit to confess Jesus as our Lord, and to tell the world what He has done and what He desires for them.

And remember His promises. You are never alone. He will never abandon you. Not when you share the Gospel with people in your life. And remember, Jesus doesn't require from us results, He doesn't require us to be successful, or to show impressing statistics of our congregation, He only expects that we will be faithful.

And He promises His faithfulness to us. Regardless of our weakness. He knows that we fear. That's why He tells us how much our Father cares for us, even in the midst of all the challenges of this life. Remember, that "even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore!"

Happy birthday brothers and sisters! Amen.