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## **“Happy birthday!” Matthew 10:21a, 21-33**

**“These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them: Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, and you will be hated by all for my name’s sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next, for truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes. A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household.**

**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.”**

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

Today we commemorate and celebrate the proclamation of the Augsburg Confession. What is that? In other words, today we celebrate the birthday of the Lutheran Church. Yes, we do!

It is a joyful occasion and may the good Lord bless our meditations!

John Duke of Saxony, George Margrave of Brandenburg, Ernest Duke of Lueneberg, Philip Landgrave of Hesse, John Frederick Duke of Saxony, Francis Duke of Lueneburg, Wolfgang Prince of Anhalt. Who are those men?

On 25<sup>th</sup> of June 1530 these seven men, these seven lords of German lands, who had become disciples of Jesus Christ, whose hearts were captured by the Gospel of forgiveness and freedom, stood in the city of Augsburg before the throne of the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, risking with their lands, properties and even their very lives, and confessed the truth about Jesus Christ.

Their confession was a written one. It was written by a man named Phillip Melancthon, the closest colleague of Dr Martin Luther. It was a summary of the Gospel as it is given to us in the Bible.

Dr Martin Luther couldn’t be there himself. He stayed 250km away, where he was still under protection of John, Duke of Saxony, as Duke John was very concerned about Luther’s safety. Came 25<sup>th</sup> of June. 1530. The city of Augsburg.

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Emperor Charles V, his counsellors, representatives of the Roman Church, the most powerful people of that day were gathered in the palace of the Bishop of Augsburg to give hearing to these evangelical lords, to allow them to confess their faith.

The day was unusually hot, and all the windows were kept open. Great crowds were gathered outside the palace. Christian Bayer (the vice-chancellor of John, the Duke of Saxony), who was known for his thundering voice, was entrusted to read the text of the confession, the same that we know as the Augsburg Confession.

So, he did. Thus, every word was heard not only in the palace, but also the crowds outside devoured every word that was confessed. When Christian Bayer had finished reading the confession, the crowds burst out in shouts of joy.

The Gospel of God's undeserved grace was read before the emperor. It is said that the bishop of Augsburg, who sat next to the emperor after hearing the Augsburg Confession read, had commented: "This is nothing, but the pure truth."

The pure truth! After the confession was read the seven lords confessed before the emperor that this is what they believe to be the truth, and that even if their lives were in danger, they wouldn't deny the truth of their Lord Jesus Christ.

No one knew it back then. No one was planning or hoping for it. But on that day, out of this courageous confession of these men, the Church of the Augsburg Confession, or as we call it, the Lutheran Church was born. Our church. Your church.

They risked their positions. They risked their possessions. They risked their lives. They risked everything. Just as Jesus had instructed: "**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. 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.**"

What do you think, why did the apostles, why did Dr Luther, why did these seven lords and countless other Christians risk and sometimes lose their very lives to confess the truth of the Gospel of their Lord Jesus Christ? Why? Was it out of fear that otherwise they themselves would be rejected by the Lord Jesus?

**And why should we acknowledge Jesus before men? Is it out of fear or is it something else?** What do you think? This is a very, very important question. The way we answer this question shapes so much in our lives; how we understand ourselves, our relationships with the Triune God, our mission. **So, why should we acknowledge the Lord Jesus before men, even if our lives are at risk?**

The answer is - because of the Gospel. Yes, because of the Good News we have received. What is this Good News? That because the Eternal Son of God became one of us as Jesus of Nazareth, because Jesus Christ put Himself in our place in God's judgment, our situation now has radically changed. Radically!

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Now, because of what Jesus did, God the Father looks at you, yes! at each one of you, whom He has brought into His family, He looks and delights in you: "You are my beloved child, with you I am well pleased! You are good, very good in my eyes."

It is not because of how we have lived our lives, not because of our noble characters or marvellous accomplishments, it is because you are united with Jesus and clothed with His holiness, and when God the Father looks at you, what does He see?

He sees you as beautiful and pure, and holy, as lovable and adorable as His true Son Jesus Christ. This is how He sees you. This is who you are for Him. This has nothing to do with what you have or haven't done in your life. It has everything to do with what Jesus Christ, God's Son, has done on your behalf.

If you are in Christ, if the Holy Spirit dwells in you, God the Father doesn't see any faults in you anymore, there are no imperfections, there is no sin, no darkness, no failure to live according to His will, He looks at you and sees His beloved child.

Perfect and holy. Destined to live forever in heavenly joy and blessedness. This was the Good News that the Reformers had re-discovered. God's grace and mercy and the gift of eternal life given to you because of Jesus. If you believe this, if the Holy Spirit convinces you, if this truly sinks in, this divine reality becomes the most important thing in your life. *God knows you, and more - He likes you!*

We sure struggle to believe this. We all do. For if we did believe it, we all would joyfully lead the life of daily repentance. What does that mean? It simply means that every day we would gladly admit everything that is not fine with us.

We would turn away from anything that hinders us to be who God our Father intended us to be, from anything that makes us less human, from anything that taints our goodness, anything that is wrong in our relationships, attitudes, actions.

We would run to our Father asking Him for His help, to take those things away, to purify us, to comfort us, to restore us and our relationships, to guide us, to give us His wisdom. We would do that. For we would be free and joyful. Are we?

"Yes... but my marriage is not going well [someone could say]. How can I tell anyone about that? What will they think of me?" Or: "Yes, but I keep slipping into my old addictions, I keep watching pornography, how can I admit it, what sort of Christian then am I?"

Your Father in heaven knew all of this and all what is yet to come in your life when He made you His child. He knew it! **"You are my beloved child. With you I am well pleased! I know your struggles, don't run from me, don't hide them, let me help!"**

"Yes, but my children are not in the Church anymore, I have failed. They are following the world now. Their relationships and lives are failing, that's my fault. I am so embarrassed that someone will find it out. I am a bad Christian."

Or: "I keep failing in my work, I keep losing jobs, I struggle financially, my life is a mess, I am such a failure!" **"You are my beloved child. With you I am well pleased, I know everything about you, nothing will change my attitude, just come to me!"**

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“Yes, but I can’t control my temper, my bitterness, my envy, my anger, I lash out on my spouse, on my children, on my fellow Christians, and then I need to blame them, for I can’t admit that this is my fault, otherwise, how will I look then?”

**“You are my beloved child; with you I am well please! Let me mend your heart, let me help to mend your relationships! Let my grace and forgiveness help you to ask for forgiveness and to restore your relationships. I will always love you!”**

Whichever way you have sinned, feel guilty, ashamed, failing, imperfect, not good enough, not matching expectations, yours or others', struggling to admit your faults and ask for forgiveness, hear the voice of your Father: **“You are my beloved child, you are good in my eyes, very good, in you I delight!”** This is true.

Every week we hear this Good News “I forgive you all your sins!” If you still struggle to believe them with your whole hearts, please, I encourage you, use the gift of private confession, arrange time, let us kneel together before the Lord.

When you come to private confession there are those three questions: **“Do you confess that you have sinned, and do you repent of your sins?”** Yes, and yes! Because you don’t need to hide anything, you don’t need to justify yourself, no need to try to make yourself look better, more holy. How so? Hear the voice: **“I am well pleased with you, my dear child!”**

Then next: **“Do you believe that Jesus Christ has redeemed you from all your sins, and do you desire forgiveness in His Name?”** Has redeemed you, yes, you! From all your sins! Past, present, future! They can’t make you look bad or unworthy in God’s eyes anymore; no one can make you less likable and less acceptable to God your Father. For Jesus has made you like Him! That’s how God the Father sees you!

Finally: **“Do you intend, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to live as in God’s presence, and to strive daily to lead a holy life, even as Christ has made you holy?”** Yes, and yes! “For you are forgiven, embraced, appreciated! Now let me help you! Don’t wait, don’t postpone, don’t hesitate to ask for my wisdom, for my instructions, for my help, come to me, let me guide you and bless you!”

The Good News. The Gospel. That is why those seven lords, Dr Martin Luther, the apostles and all the brave Christians who have come before us, that is why they could be so courageous. For they have heard and believed in the Gospel of forgiveness and freedom. The love of God had taken away all fear.

May the gracious Lord help us to believe this Good News not only with our minds, but with our hearts, with our whole being. Then we too will cherish this message of God’s grace more than anything.

Then we will be free and overjoyed, then no one will be able to keep us silent, for we will want everyone to know that the Lord is good. That will be our greatest joy to acknowledge our Lord Jesus Christ before others.

**“Do not fear! Do not fear! For I am with you till the end of the age!”**

Happy birthday, fellow Lutherans! Amen.