

Pastor Chris Matthis
Epiphany Lutheran Church, Castle Rock, Colorado
LWML Weekend (Pentecost 17)
Saturday, September 30th, 2017
Sunday, October 1st, 2017

Sermon: Called to Confess

Text: 2 Timothy 4:1-4; Matthew 10:26-33

Focus: Christ will confess all true believers before his Father in heaven.

Function: That they would gladly confess the saving name of Jesus Christ.

Structure: Text-Application

Locus: "I believe that Jesus Christ... is my Lord..., who has redeemed me..." (SC, 2nd Article of Apostles' Creed).

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ! Amen. Our theme for today's LWML celebration, "In Season and Out of Season," comes from the Apostle Paul's second letter to Timothy: "Preach the Word; be ready in season and out of season..." (2 Tim. 4:2a, ESV).¹ The cover of our bulletin captures this idea of seasonal activity for the kingdom of God, picturing a tree in spring, summer, fall, and winter. As Americans living in a culture obsessed with sports, we are familiar with the importance of practice and exercise during the off-season so that the team is up to par for the regular season play. Even Little Leaguers, like my 9 and 10-year-old nephews, train year-round to stay in shape. And so we recognize that the Lord's

¹ All Scripture references, unless otherwise indicated, are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version.

servant must always hone his craft through prayer and study of the Scriptures. I used to quote this verse regularly in conversation with a pastor friend of mine who was waiting for a church to call him back into ministry. With or without a call, I suggested he needed to be ready in season and out of season.

But there's a lot more to it than that. The Greek phrase translated as "in season and out of season" literally means "in good times and at the wrong time."² In other words, at opportune and *inopportune* times, we must be ready to speak the Word of God. As God's children, we don't get to choose when we will be called to make a confession of faith—or to whom we will make that confession. We must *always* be ready, "in season and out of season," at good times and bad. Rarely will it be a time of our choosing.

In 1521, when Martin Luther was summoned to the Diet of Worms by the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V, he went willingly, albeit fearfully, expecting never to return. Nearly a hundred years earlier the

² Greek: *eukairōs akairōs*.

Czech reformer, Jan Hus, had been burned at the stake at the Council of Constance after a similar summons. Luther was questioned by representatives of the emperor and the pope, who demanded that he recant his writings, laid out on the table in the middle of the room, and get back in line with Catholic teaching. At first, Luther *wasn't* ready. I know that we often go straight to the powerful “Here I stand” moment, but that didn't happen right away. Faced with the full force of Church and State, he hesitated and doubted himself. He asked for more time.

“This touches God and his Word,” Luther said. “This affects the salvation of souls. Of this Christ said, ‘He who denies me before men, him will I deny before my father.’ To say too little or too much would be dangerous. I beg you, give me time to think it over.”³

More time?! His opponents were enraged. Luther had had nothing *but* time—nearly 3½ years had passed since he nailed the 95 Theses to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg. The time for thoughtful reflection was over. The time to recant had come!

³ Martin Luther, as quoted by Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1950), 183.

Nevertheless, Charles V graciously gave Luther one more night to think it over. When Luther appeared before the Diet the next day, once again they pointed out his books, sermons, and pamphlets, arrayed before him, and recant his position. Time to take it all back!

Here was Luther's reply:

“Since then Your Majesty and your lordships desire a simple reply, I will answer without horns and without teeth. Unless I am convinced by Scripture and plain reason—I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other—my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. [Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise.] God help me. Amen.”⁴

Here I stand! Talk about a powerful confession of faith! Martin Luther took his stand on the Word of God—not Church tradition, not the rules of men, not his own opinions, but solely on the Holy Scriptures. When the moment finally came, Luther found himself ready, not because he was so eloquent or wise, but because of his prayerful deliberation and reliance on the Word of God.

⁴ Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 185.

All Christians are called to confess the saving name of Jesus Christ and the truth of his Holy Word. In our Gospel lesson, Jesus declares: “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” (Matt. 10:32-33). The Greek word for “acknowledge” (*homologeō*) is normally translated as “confess” elsewhere in the New Testament (cf. Rom. 14:11; Rev. 3:5). To confess literally means to “say the same things together.” When we confess our sins, we agree with God when he calls us sinners in need of repentance and mercy. And when we confess our faith, we agree with God’s Word and one another that Jesus is our only Savior and Lord.

Every week that we gather for public worship, we confess our faith in the words of the great ecumenical creeds of the Church, typically the Apostles’ Creed or the Nicene Creed, which are great summaries of what the Scriptures teach about God, creation, Jesus, salvation, and the world to come. We stand when we confess our faith because it shows that we are willing to *take a stand* and say to the Church, “This I believe.

Here I stand. I can do no other. So help me God!” Confessing our faith in Church is a glorious thing. But it’s also kind of like preaching to the choir. It’s fairly easy to confess our faith in Christ when we are shoulder-to-shoulder with our fellow believers. We may call it one of those “in season” or “opportune” times (2 Tim. 4:2).

But it’s more difficult to contend for the faith when we are out in the world, faced with persecution, temptation, and distractions. Those are the “out of season,” or *inopportune* times. Jesus warns, “You will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the [nations]”⁵ (Matt. 10:18). Just as all of the apostles and Martin Luther were put on trial for their faith, so also we may be called to confess Jesus before city councils, coaches, school boards, employers, judges, governors, and maybe even presidents.

In the first century A.D., during the reign of the Roman emperor Domitian, the first official persecution of Christians began by the Roman government. Prior to this, most persecutions were localized and

⁵ Or, “Gentiles” (original).

confined to a certain city or territory. But now persecution broke out across the empire. Christians were arrested and murdered unless they would curse the name of Christ and offer incense to a statue of the emperor. Many Christians capitulated to save their skin, reasoning that they were still Christians in their heart. But the Church took a strong stance against them and said no compromise could be tolerated. Either you stood for Jesus, or you did not. Either you confess Christ, or you don't. There are no two ways about it.

Jesus sternly warns us as much when he declares that “whoever *denies* me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 10:33). Let that sobering statement sink in. If you deny Jesus before other people, and fail to confess him, then *he* will deny you before God in heaven, and you will be damned, lost to the flames of hell forever.

People of God, the culture is turning against Christianity. It is as Paul predicted: “For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from

listening to the truth and wander off into myths” (2 Tim. 2:3-4). We live in a very inopportune time. People do not want to hear the truth that Jesus is the only way of salvation. They want to listen to the myths of evolution, socialism, tolerance, relativism, universalism, the New Age movement, the so-called prosperity “gospel,” and others. As followers of Jesus, we cannot shrink back and keep silent while the world goes to hell. We cannot and will not recant our faith in Jesus Christ, the only Son of God who died on the cross to save us from our sins and rose again to give us eternal life. In season and out of season, we are called to confess Christ and contend for the Word of God.

It will not be easy. Life was not easy for any of the apostles or Martin Luther or any other of the confessors. Life is not easy for our brothers and sisters in Christ who gather for prayer and worship in North Korea, Saudi Arabia, China, or Iran. But when we confess Christ, we have the confidence that we are not alone. The Lord Jesus stands by us to strengthen us (2 Tim. 4:17). He will never leave you or forsake you. He is with you even to the end of the age (Matt. 28:20).

Furthermore, Jesus makes great promises for those moments.

“When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given you in that hour. For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you” (Matt. 10:19-20). While we should always be ready and prepared, the ultimate preparation is a heart that believes in Jesus and trusts his Word. Don’t worry about memorizing every chapter and verse of Scripture or having some kind of zinger argument. God will tell you what to say when you need to say it. The Holy Spirit will prompt you, bringing to mind a Scripture, a hymn verse, or even the plain words of the Apostles’ Creed. For it will not be you speaking in that hour, but God himself speaking *through* you!

And what about those times when we miss the moment and fail to confess? St. Peter denied Jesus three times at his trial, cursing with an oath and declaring, “I do not know the man” (Matt. 26:70, 72, 74).

Surely, if anyone denied Jesus, it was Peter. Surely, if anyone deserved hell, it was Peter. And yet Christ in his mercy forgave Peter, reinstating him in leadership of the Church, and commanding him to “Feed my

lambs” (John 21:15). If you forget or make a mistake or even deny Christ himself, it’s not the end of the world—not yet, at least. There is time to repent and ask God’s forgiveness. If we are faithless, he remains faithful, and he will do it. His mercies are new every morning, and tomorrow is another dawn of grace—if tomorrow comes.

Today is LWML Sunday. Lutheran Women’s *Missionary* League. Let’s help put the Missionary back in LWML as we boldly take a stand and confess the saving name of Jesus. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.