

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

A sermon on Hebrews 4, focusing on the synod decision, my conviction and the biblical reasons why.

¹¹Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. ¹²For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. ¹³And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

¹⁴Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Hebrews 4:11–16 (ESV)

What is the Word of God?

Perhaps as you consider this, you might feel it is better to ask, ‘Who is the word of God?’ This answer will be the one we arrive at anyway.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. ⁴In him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. John 1:1–5 (ESV)

¹⁴And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:14 (ESV)

Jesus is the Word of God. It is not a what at all; it is a who. A person, the second person of the trinity. Your brother, the one who became man and dwelt among us. The high priest, the great high priest, the one who is greater than all the high priests of the Old Testament, greater than Moses, greater than angels. HE, Jesus Christ, true God and true Man, is the Word of God.

When we get to the question of ‘What is the Word of God?’, we see that unless it starts with ‘who’, the question is pointless. The ‘what’ question helps us see that the Word of God must be Jesus. It is his spoken words that called life from death, cast out demons, cured disease, created the universe, conquered nations... gave life.

Secondly, it is his written Word, spoken by his servants the Apostles and recorded for us in sermons, letters and narratives. These are Jesus’ words, the Word of God, for us. That is why

when they are read, we proclaim, 'This is the word of the LORD'. For we truly believe it is. We are bound to these words, bound to Jesus.

We accept without reservation the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as a whole and in all their parts, as the divinely inspired, written and inerrant Word of God, and as the only infallible source and norm for all matters of faith, doctrine and life. Constitution II.1

For Jesus said,

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." Matthew 28:18–20 (ESV)

We need to observe all of his commands, that is only found in his Words. And

²³Jesus answered him, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. ²⁴Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me. John 14:23–24 (ESV)

What is the Word of God doing? Today's texts from Hebrews and Mark explain this:

¹²For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. ¹³And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

The Word is working on you. Like a skilled surgeon seeking out a cancerous lump, the Word is cutting you up and releasing you from all your burdens. It is dividing your sin from your Saviour. It is cutting off your dead branches and grafting in new life.

It may also sear the consciences of those who refuse to believe, like the rich man in our gospel reading. In short, the Word of God does the impossible for you. It is suffering, dying, rising to life, and delivering that all to you in one fell swoop.

The Word, Jesus, is also dividing. As taught through Paul 'for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized'. 1 Corinthians 11:19 (ESV) The Word of God is the tool we use to discern who is speaking Jesus' truth and who is mixing in lies.

Therefore, we should talk about the lies we saw on the floor of the Convention of Synod and at the General Pastor's Conference just last week. The arguments that have been used to implement the ordination of women deny these things about Jesus and his written Word. They don't even claim to have scriptural authority.

A synodical debate should be conducted in this way: When a motion is proposed, speakers take that motion and apply scripture or theology to it to either speak for or against it. On Saturday, we saw those against the Way Forward motion taking the foundational documents, such as the Constitution, the Theses of Agreement, the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, and the Scriptures, and tearing apart the Way Forward motion. It had no legs to stand on.

Those who wished for women to be ordained didn't even engage with the motion. They didn't apply Scripture or the Confessions. Instead, they trampled all over the key teachings and made arguments such as, 'I'm tired of this debate, so vote for this motion'. 'Those against are just scared of change. Vote for this motion.' 'I feel like I could be a pastor and vote for this motion.' 'Other countries ordain women, and it works for them'. There was not one use of Scripture, nor was there one coherent or logical argument. Emotion and culture were all that they had, and still have, all the while pretending that they uphold the Scriptures and understand the issues of conscience, desire unity, and share an understanding of the Gospel.

They call into question passages that are clear and say that they are unclear. It's not really that they are unclear; they're unpalatable. They grind against their culturally informed conscience. They give an excuse to deny the LCA teaching on church fellowship, the Scriptures, the Theses of Agreement, the Gospel and ultimately, Jesus. To put it another way, how this Way Forward motion has been implemented gives the LCA a new view of Scripture and, therefore, a different Jesus, a different Gospel; it is a new identity.

By its decision on Saturday, the LCA broke fellowship with me. The LCA has changed its identity. It is no longer the church body into which I was ordained. In that synodical vote, the LCA died. I have not left the LCA; the LCA has left me, and if you hold to the historic teaching on ordination, the LCA has abandoned you. For the LCA has returned to the pre-reformation papist error, that scripture is second or third to reason, culture and tradition. Despite what the constitutions confess, Scripture has been trampled upon and the LCA has removed themselves from God.

What is the faithful way forward? For me, the faithful way forward is to move out of the LCA.

Because I am your shepherd, the faithful way forward is to call you out of the LCA. I invite you to come with me, my sheep; this place is unsafe for you. Come to a place where there are fresh pastures and clean water so that you can have rest. God desires you to have rest, he wants you to be found confident in Jesus, resting in his gifts.

The LCA will not give you the rest that you desire: confidence in Christ, the confidence to draw near to him, the peace that God desires to give you, and the hope of your salvation.

The LCA's decision destroys the integrity of Scripture and denies its own core document. This change in teaching and practice has been implemented using deceptive means and lies.

This in itself should be enough to break fellowship. The Thesis of Agreement is the foundational document of the LCA. As current members of the LCA, you are expected to adhere to this document. If you hold to the historic teaching of the Office of the Ministry and wish to uphold the LCA's foundational documents, this doctrine compels you to leave the LCA. Additionally, the foundational document regarding unionism and syncretism in the constitution of your congregation III.2.A. also indicates that the only way forward is to separate from the LCA.

I know not all of you hold to the historic teaching on ordination and not all of you hold to the Bible as 'the divinely inspired, written and inerrant Word of God, and as the only infallible source and norm for all matters of faith, doctrine and life' as your constitution demands, even though you hold membership in this congregation. Still, I'm calling you to come out. Come out from this unfaithful body to have the pure Word.

Let me give you an analogy here to connect to the Hebrew reading. What the LCA has done is that they have taken to the sword of the spirit, which is the Word of God, and repeatedly belted it against a rock so that it is as dull as a spoon. Now they want to take that sword and perform surgery on you, to try to root out your sin and deliver to you the Saviour. They should have instead taken that sword and gently sharpened it against the rock so that it was razor-sharp and able to do its job. Do you want a surgeon to operate on you with a blunt scalpel, the one he just dropped on the floor? Do you think he will achieve the same result with that dull knife as he could with a properly treated scalpel?

I am willing to serve you and help you leave this church body. We may find a way for me to stay and serve you. It will most likely look very different and be difficult, but we can step forward in faith, knowing that God will be with us through it all. He's been abiding with us to this point. Why would he leave us now unless we actively abandon him, as the LCA has done?

My conscience is bound to the Word of God, and therefore, I cannot continue to be an LCA pastor. I can serve you for a time, but not an extended period of time in the LCA. Thus, we must address the issue of Holy Communion.

Corinthians tells us that Holy Communion is participation with God and one another:

¹⁴Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. ¹⁵I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. ¹⁶The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? ¹⁷Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. ¹⁸Consider the people of Israel: are not those who eat the sacrifices participants in the altar? ¹⁹What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? ²⁰No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons. ²¹You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons.

²² Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he? 1 Corinthians
10:14–22 (ESV)

To be clear, I am not saying that communion in an LCA church is participation with demons! I am not saying that there are no Christians in the LCA.

There is a fellowship/participation horizontal and vertical. In the Sacrament of the Altar, we are received into fellowship with God (vertical) and are in fellowship with one another (horizontal). We agree as one body that we believe, teach and confess the same things about the Sacrament. There is no question about the vertical fellowship; we are not calling into question the efficacy or validity of the Lord's Supper. We need to talk about the horizontal fellowship. When we commune at an LCA altar, we are also, by extension, in fellowship with all those within the church body under whose banner we stand. Therefore to share the Holy Meal together as an LCA congregation is giving assent to the new doctrine of the LCA. This has always been the Lutheran belief; we even have statements about this issue. The one that comes to mind is written to give guidance on who can commune with us. It is called 'Some pastoral guidelines for responsible communion practice' and states quite plainly:

Some people want to do something which seems to us to be contradictory: they want to attend Lutheran altars frequently and regularly. And yet they also wish to retain their membership in a non-Lutheran congregation. The pastor should lovingly and firmly help such people to see the apparent contradiction in their actions, and help them to resolve any inconsistencies.

This is written regarding our own altar and who should participate. Now the shoe is on the other foot: this statement tells us we shouldn't commune in an Anglican, Uniting, Catholic, or Reformed church because doing so would be to say, "I agree with your teachings. I belong to you." How can we unquestioningly commune at an LCA altar when many of us have been abandoned by our church? The fellowship that held us together until Saturday is destroyed.

I ask your grace. I'm going to suggest that we have only preaching services for a short period of time while we discuss this and ascertain and discern if the congregations of this parish are willing to leave as a whole or if some of the members of the congregation are going to choose to leave on their own, or if everyone is going to remain in the LCA. I'm willing to discern this with you. I don't think we need years to decide this. We need to discern this in weeks or months. I ask that we don't celebrate the sacrament for that short period of time until we can come to a new fellowship agreement.

In this time of discernment, I'd also like you to join me on a bible reading challenge. I'm not proposing reading the whole bible in a year or a month, nothing that adventurous. What I'd like to do is read the same book, in its entirety, every day for a month. I have picked the book of Galatians; it deals with many of the issues we face. I invite you to read it in either paper form or find a way to listen to it; I have recorded myself reading it and will make it available online. Read

it through in its entirety every day. You might do a chapter here or there or in one hit; it will take approximately 20 minutes each day.

When you have a question, write it down and send it to me via email, text or call and ask, or invite me for a visit. These will form the basis of the sermons for the coming weeks. I will answer your questions. All Bible studies will be Q&A, so please also attend these so that I can answer as many questions as possible.

Now is not a time for uncertainty. Now is the time to be fully confident in Christ, to be seeking the Word of God to discern even our inner thoughts. Now is a time to be honest about our opinions on Scripture. If you are unsure, you must search the Scriptures and find confidence. (Please ask for resources if you do not have them or cannot find them.) If you are confident in your view, read the opposing view and see if it has scriptural merit. Don't be afraid to discuss with each other, ask questions, seek clarifications. We will not work this out by isolating ourselves. We may find a harmonious solution if we all engage each other.

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Amen.

The peace of God that surpasses all our understanding keep your hearts and your minds safe in Christ Jesus. Amen.