



[Rev. Steven S. Billings](#)

**Sermon for the Pentecost 4**  
June 25, 2023

## Have No Fear

### Matthew 10:5a, 21–33

<sup>5</sup> *These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them,*

<sup>21</sup> *“Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, <sup>22</sup> and you will be hated by all for my name’s sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. <sup>23</sup> 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.*

<sup>24</sup> *“A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. <sup>25</sup> 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.*

<sup>26</sup> *“So have no fear of them, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. <sup>27</sup> What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops. <sup>28</sup> 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. <sup>29</sup> Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. <sup>30</sup> But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. <sup>31</sup> Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows. <sup>32</sup> So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, <sup>33</sup> but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.”*

Concerning the enemies of the Gospel, the persecutors of the Church, and all who behave wickedly, Jesus directs His followers, “Have no fear of them . . .”

On June 25, 1530, the text of the Augsburg Confession, signed by seven princes and the representatives of two free cities, was presented to Emperor Charles V in both Latin and German. Following the title and subtitle, the Reformers quoted this Scripture passage from Psalm 119(:46), “I will also speak of your testimonies before kings, and shall not be put to shame.”

This confession of faith was given in response to an imperial diet which was called for the purpose of discussing certain religious differences between the Lutherans and the church of Rome in the hope of overcoming them, restoring unity, and having a united front in the war against the invading armies of Islam. The German princes desired, as the summons said, to “accept and preserve a single, true religion. Inasmuch as we are all enlisted under one Christ, we are all to live together in one communion and in one church” (AC Preface, pp. 4).

These German princes and their theologians never intended to put forth a new



[Rev. Steven S. Billings](#)

### ***Sermon for the Pentecost 4***

*June 25, 2023*

teaching. They simply desired to *reform* the doctrinal errors and human traditions which had polluted the church, doctrines and traditions which were not supported by the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The reformers went to great lengths to show that they had not departed from what the church had taught from the beginning. In the very first article it quotes the Nicene Creed, one of the confessions of the Faith that had been universally accepted by the whole church.

Twenty-one of its twenty-eight articles deal with matters of which there was much agreement with the Roman church. At the end of those twenty-one articles, it says:

“This is just about a summary of the doctrines that are preached and taught in our churches . . . Since this teaching is grounded clearly on the Holy Scriptures and is not contrary or opposed to that of the universal Christian church, or even of the Roman church . . . we think that our opponents cannot disagree with us in the articles set forth above.”<sup>1</sup>

Their opponents, however, did disagree. They had denounced this teaching nine years earlier, and the Emperor had already declared Dr. Luther to be a heretic and had outlawed his teaching. Even while this Confession was being read in Augsburg, Luther was staying at Coburg Castle on the Southern border of Saxony. His Elector would not allow him to attend the diet, lest he be arrested and executed.

The Roman theologians proceeded to write a response to the Augsburg Confession, called the *Confutation*, which they presented to the Emperor on August 3rd. In it they detailed their objections to the Augsburg Confession, chief of which was in respect to Article IV, which declares the Lutheran teaching on justification.

The Lutherans stated: “Our churches also teach that men cannot be justified before God by their own strength, merits, or works but are freely justified for Christ’s sake through faith when they believe that they are received into favor and that their sins are forgiven on account of Christ, who by his death made satisfaction for our sins. This faith God imputes for righteousness in his sight,” referring then to Romans chapters 3 and 4.

The Catholics responded: “When [the Lutherans] say that we are justified by faith, this is the great and principal error of the preachers. For to faith alone they ascribe that which belongs to works of love,” meaning that forgiveness of sins, in their view, is earned by doing good, not by faith in the work done for us by Christ on the cross. Referring to Galatians 5[:6] for scriptural support of this claim, they essentially turn Paul’s argument on its head. Paul is not saying that love earns salvation. What he’s saying is that faith *expresses itself* in acts of love. Our works do not – cannot – earn salvation for us, but they do express the salvation we have through faith in Christ. Faith in Christ lays hold of salvation; faith working through love is the *result* of saving faith, not the cause of it. The Roman teaching on this is obviously contrary to Scripture, for Scripture says that we are saved by grace through *faith*, not by works (Eph. 2:8-9). The Roman teaching on Justification is one of the primary doctrinal errors the Lutherans wanted to address in the



[Rev. Steven S. Billings](#)

## ***Sermon for the Pentecost 4***

*June 25, 2023*

Augsburg Confession.

Now, Jesus had taught His disciples many things in private that, by the time of today's Gospel, He wanted "proclaim[ed] from the housetops." And so the disciples began to proclaim the things concerning His death and resurrection as payment for the sins of the world. June 25, 1530 was a time for such proclamation, and Jesus' words brought the Reformers great comfort as they approached this monumental task. They were especially encouraged by the words we find in our Gospel today.

For instance, Jesus says in our text, "Have no fear . . . for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known." Beloved, do not be afraid to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is, after all, the truth and the truth will be heard. Speak it boldly, for God is with you.

And "do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul." Oh, make no mistake, those who confess Christ will be persecuted. "You will be hated by all for my name's sake," Jesus says. Some who confess Christ will be killed, have been killed, are being killed in various parts of the world. Others will be physically harmed, some merely slandered and maligned. But, take great comfort; they cannot kill your soul. Only God can do that. And unbelief is the only cause.

And think of this: God knows the coming and going of the sparrows, and even has the hairs of your head numbered. And "you are of more value than many sparrows." Dear child of God, nothing will happen to you without your Father's knowledge and providence.

Finally, there is a glorious promise associated with confessing Christ. If you confess Him before men, He will confess you before His Father in heaven.

Now, I need to say something to you about that word: *confess*. The English Standard Version, which our Synod has unofficially chosen as its translation of record, is not nearly strong enough when it comes to verse 32. The Greek word used here – *homologeō* – is translated in the ESV as "acknowledges." "Everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven." So says the ESV. But *homologeō* doesn't mean "to admit that you know someone." It means "to say the same thing." In this context it means to say the same thing as Christ, or "to be in agreement" with Christ. We agree with Him when, for example, He says that He is the Son of God, and when He says that God desires all people to be saved, that He is the only way to the Father, and so on, as we do in the Creeds. Of course, we *acknowledge* Christ, but that's not the point. The point is that confession of the Gospel of Jesus Christ – and, to our cause for celebration today, the confession expressed in the Augsburg Confession – is saying the same thing that He said. In fact, it's the same confession found all over the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, the same confession taught by the Church since Christ Himself established it, the same confession proclaimed by the church fathers of every age. As I mentioned earlier, the Augsburg Confession was not saying anything new; it was an effort to return the Church to its foundation on the Word



[Rev. Steven S. Billings](#)

***Sermon for the Pentecost 4***

*June 25, 2023*

of God.

The promise of Christ, that He would confess before His Father those who were willing to confess Him before men, bolstered the Reformers to make this Confession, affirming in their conclusion what they maintained from the start: “Nothing has been received among us, in doctrine or in ceremonies, that is contrary to Scripture or to the church catholic” (meaning the universal church). “For it is manifest that we have guarded diligently against the introduction into our churches of any new and ungodly doctrines.”

What began with Jesus sending out the Twelve at the beginning of this chapter reaches its climax, with the whole purpose of the church being expressed in verses 32 and 33. Our entire purpose as a church – as the holy catholic church, the universal church on earth – is not to be popular, but to be *confessional*. We’re not called to speak words that people will agree with, we’re called “to confess Christ before men.” We’re not called to transform a world run amok, we’re called to speak the truth of Christ, whatever the cost.

Our purpose as the church is the preaching of forgiveness of sins and the justification of the sinner. Or as the Augsburg Confession puts it: “the teaching concerning faith, which is the principal part of the Christian life . . .” (AC XX, 8).

Beloved, we find ourselves in an age in which it is necessary for us, as congregations and pastors, to make a confession. There are those in our world who want to silence the church and intimidate us into corners and out of the public square. “Religion is between you and God,” they say. “We don’t want to hear about your God.” Yet, all the while, they parade their abominations anywhere they choose, even to the point of wresting control of synodical institutions of higher learning to indoctrinate our young people. And, not only do they expect us to shut up and take it, they insist that we agree them . . . or else!

The Reformers took a stand at great personal risk and expense to speak the truth in love at a time when it was neither popular nor safe to go against the prevailing opinion. We have the truth because of their faithfulness. Are we willing to be as faithful so that we can pass that truth on to the next generation?

It won’t be easy. We must expect persecution. Confessing the true Gospel of Jesus will involve speaking to those who have no tolerance for it. Or for us. But hear again the comforting words of Jesus, “Have no fear of them, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known.” “Everyone who confesses me before men, I also will confess before my Father who is in heaven.” “Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

1. Tappert, T. G. (Ed.). (1959). *The Book of Concord the confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. (pp. 47–48). Philadelphia: Mühlenberg Press.