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Luke 7:18-35

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit

Like most of theology, we run into the greatest error when we stress one truth over another.
Jesus is always the best example here:

if you push His divinity over His humanity, you end up turning Jesus into a ghost—
God didn't *really* die on the cross.

And if you push His humanity over His divinity, you join the Arians and the Jehovah
Witnesses in saying there was a time when Jesus was not,
making the death on the cross worthless—just another dead guy.

Lutherans love this sort of paradox.

We love to hold these two truths together, not letting one trump the other.

This Jesus, both *true God, begotten of the Father from eternity,*
and also true Man, born of the Virgin Mary,
is our Lord.

Another good Lutheran paradox comes with Jesus at the Lord's Supper:

is it true bread and true wine or true body and true blood?

And all the Lutherans said, "Both!"

These paradoxes hold together not because they make sense to us, but because God said so.

And Lutherans do best when they simply say back to God what He has first said to us.

And in that, our Worship—the prayers we pray, the hymns we sing, and the creeds we confess—
reflects this Word of God.

That's all we do, we say, sing, and pray back to God what He has spoken to us in His Word.

This way of life, this way of worship and belief, is what Lutherans have always called
Lex orandi, lex credendi.

In fact, that phrase was first coined by Prosper of Aquitaine, a student of St. Augustine in the 5th
century, so Lutherans have thought and spoken this way for about 1500 years!

What's it mean?

Literally it means the law of praying is the law of believing—
or better, "the way you pray reflects the way you believe."

It's a way of saying you practice what you preach.

Doctrine and Practice together.

Soul and Body

Faith and Works

Teaching and Living

Hearing and Seeing

Believing and being Baptized.

But this law—*lex orandi; lex credendi*—can also be reversed:
the way you believe reflects the way you pray.

What this means is that the more you pray, or worship in a certain way the more you'll learn to believe that way, too.

If your prayers never speak Jesus' name, eventually you'll find Him unnecessary for prayer. If your hymns sing only of what you do for God, pretty soon you'll think that's what counts.

This law runs both ways:
we worship in a certain way because we believe certain things;
and we believe certain things because that's the way we've learned to worship.

About 25 years ago a book came out that challenged this law.
The book was called *Evangelical Style, Lutheran Substance*.¹
The purpose of this book was to answer the problem of church membership today—
why are all the non-denominational churches growing and the Lutherans are stagnant?

The book proposed that Lutherans need to keep their doctrine, their *substance*,
but should freely change their practice, their *style*.

It's a good question, but the wrong answer.

Many churches bought into this form of church growth;
and in many places, they did indeed, find growth.

But what we've also found, some two decades after this book was released,
is that many of these churches are no longer familiar with the confessions of the church.

Their style certainly changed,
but with it, over time, so did their substance.

Now there are all sorts of reasons for why our churches were wooed by this sort of thinking—
the biggest is that they weren't being taught *why* they worship the *way* they worship.

But that aside, that's why we're very intentional about our worship here, because we're very intentional about our doctrine here.

The two go hand-in-hand, whether you like it or not.

Now this law comes into our text today in a very important way—
doctrine and practice come together in Christ.

His worship and His teaching go together.

So, when John the Baptizer sends two of his disciples, asking: "Are you the *Coming One*,"
Jesus responds with *both*: doctrine and practice, word and work, faith and deeds.

¹ David Luecke, *Evangelical Style and Lutheran Substance: Facing America's Mission Challenge* (St. Louis: CPH, 1988).

He says to John's disciples,

“Go and tell John what you have seen and heard:

the blind receive their sight,

the lame walk,

lepers are cleansed,

and the deaf hear,

the dead are raised up,

the poor have good news preached to them.

And blessed is the one who is not offended by Me.” (Lk 7:22-23)

This is the proof that Jesus is the *coming One*, the Christ, the long-expected seed of Eve.

And the evidence is in what He does and what He says—

the two go together.

But when John's disciples went away, Jesus turned to the crowds and told them a bit about John.

John is also a substance and style kinda guy.

His life of self-abandonment matches what he preaches.

Jesus says that John is a prophet, even “more than a prophet”—

the very messenger, the angel sent ahead to prepare the way.

And with John, doctrine and practice also come together.

Luke adds a very important parenthetical note in verses 29-30:

“(When all the people heard this, and the tax collectors too,

they declared God just, having been baptized with the baptism of John,

but the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the purpose of God for themselves,

not having been baptized by him.)”

That is to say, those who heard the preaching of John and believed the message, *the substance*, responded with proper worship: they were baptized.

But those who rejected the preaching of John, who didn't believe or confess as he taught, responded in the style you'd expect: they weren't baptized.

And so Jesus tells us that to reject John's baptism is to reject the purpose (will) of God.

You couldn't accept John's word without the accompanying practice of Baptism.

And no one was baptized without the substance of the faith.

At the Jordan, the two went together: faith and practice, repentance and baptism.

So it is for all of you gathered here today.

Today your doctrine matches your practice.

Your worship and prayers show your trust in Christ alone.

And to those who believe themselves truly beggars, truly hungry and thirsty for righteousness, then this altar is where you'll come and be fed.

All our worship, everything we do here, every bit of our style confesses that we believe Jesus is truly here for us.

Here He is with forgiveness, life, and salvation—
and so we respond with thankfulness and praise, humility and deep reverence.

And when we leave here, let us live out this faith continually.
That doesn't mean getting it right all the time—
it means living each day and moment as if God is really with us in Christ.

That sort of faithful trust, that *substance*, came to us long ago by means of our baptismal worship.
There we received God in Christ for us.

And here He comes again—
never to leave you or forsake you—
but always for you.

In Christ our doctrine and our practice meet.
And together, they both confess Christ, the *Coming One*, for us!

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit