

Christ is risen!

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

There are many ways to misunderstand the Scriptures.
And there are many ways people claim to have Christ.

The Jehovah Witnesses have a Jesus who is less than God.
The Muslims have a Jesus they claim to be a prophet.
The Mormon Jesus came to America.
And the Jesus of most Americans today just wants us all to be happy.

Hindus have no problem adding Jesus into their pantheon of gods.
Buddhists will gladly add some of his moral teachings to their repertoire.
Jews are sometimes willing to admit He was a good teacher—
but that He certainly wasn't God.

But that's all outside of Christianity.
No one expects them to get Jesus right anyhow.

What about the various churches and denominations?
Who is Jesus for them?

Some would have Jesus primarily as a moral example—
you remember the bracelets: WWJD—*What Would Jesus Do?*
Others find in Him an escape from this world, an experience and feeling of being out of body.
And then there are some that see Him as the most rational and logical leader ever to have lived.

Even Christians turn Jesus into a way of getting rich quickly.
Even Christians use Jesus as a way of showing hatred, turning people against one another—
whether rich or poor,
or male or female,
gay or straight,
or any other way we can divide people up.

And when it comes down to it, even for most Christian,
Jesus is pretty great—
but He isn't everything.

Even for most Christians, if you really want to be sure you're saved,
then it's always Jesus + something:
Jesus + the works of your hands;
Jesus + your heartfelt decision;
Jesus + your spiritual progress and maturity;
or, Jesus + your prosperity.

But that's not the way the Scriptures give us Jesus.
It's never Jesus + anything else;
it's always Jesus *only*.

That's the treasure we have in our confessions:
the certainty of our salvation rests in what Jesus alone has done.

We are made right with God apart from anything we've said, done, or felt—
only by God's grace alone through faith in Christ Jesus alone.

That's a doctrine you don't want to lose!
In fact that doctrine is the heart and soul of our confessions.
That is what it means to be *Lutheran*—
which is nothing else than to be *Christian*.

And every other article of our faith, every other teaching and doctrine we hold to as Lutherans,
is tied to this article of Justification.

That's why I'm a Lutheran:
because our confessions let me believe without any doubt that it's all about
Jesus for me.

And this pure doctrine, the right confession, should never be given up for the world.

However, perhaps the greatest temptation for the Lutheran Church,
is to place her trust in her doctrine.
That's how we fall off the horse, the other way.

That's the mistake the disciples made in today's Gospel.

Jesus admitted that He had been speaking in figures of speech; but then He said,
*"I came from the Father and have come into the world,
and now I am leaving the world and going to the Father."* (Jn 16:28)

When the disciples heard this they said,
"Ah, now you are speaking plainly!" (16:29)—
"We get it!"

And rather than trusting in Jesus—
who He is and what He is promising to do for them—
they trust that they've got it all figured out.

And so Jesus plainly says, *"No you don't."*
*"Do you now believe? Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come,
when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone."* (16:32)

That rebuke of the disciples is for us too.
 Our great temptation is to trust that we've got Jesus *figured out*—
 that He fits nicely into our system and that we've done so well to get Him right.

If we believe because we've figured it out—
 then we don't actually believe—
 at least, then we don't believe in *Him*.

Faith isn't simply getting the doctrine right—
 it's believing in Jesus even when I keep getting it wrong.

You see, if I actually believed that salvation is by Jesus only,
 then I'd quit starting sentences: "*If I could just...*"
 If I actually believed in Jesus only,
 then I'd quit trying to base my self-worth on the approval of others.
 If I believed in Jesus only,
 then I'd find more joy in receiving the sacrament than my paycheck.

But like the disciples, the hour has come and I'm scattered—
 fleeing in the face of suffering and tribulation,
 and seeking approval of men rather than God.

This is my burden.
 That's what terrifies my conscience.
 That even though I know the doctrine is right,
 when it comes down to it, I can't trust in my rightness—
 because everything I do turns it away from Jesus only, back to me.

That's the way of this world.

"*But take heart;*" Jesus says,
 "*I have overcome the world.*"

And from our Introit:
 "*Cast your burden on the LORD, and He will sustain you;
 He will never permit the righteous to be moved.*"

That's our prayer:
 that it would all be Jesus only.

*Grant to us, O Heavenly Father, that that we may think what is right about Jesus,
 and, by Your merciful guidance, live this out in our lives.*

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