

In the name of ✠ Jesus. Amen.

It's good to be a Lutheran — although, I don't want anyone to think that by saying that I'm boasting. We Lutherans are averse to boasting or any ostentation, so the cliché goes. Playing the church organ and singing in the choir present no problem, according to Garrison Keillor, but if you want to play in the orchestra, the only instruments suitable for a Lutheran are percussion and the harp. The other instruments just call too much attention to yourself. No Lutheran would ever stand for that! *"Blessed are the poor in spirit ... blessed are the meek." "Theirs is the kingdom of heaven ... they shall inherit the earth."*

Of course, Keillor is poking fun at Lutherans, and I don't mind it. There is a bit of truth to it; otherwise, it wouldn't be funny. President Harrison, when he testified before the House Oversight Committee a couple years ago, mentioned that Lutherans are often considered "quietistic." We just sort of accept things calmly *"as they are without attempts to resist or change them."* We don't really want to be in the spotlight.

So Lutherans are not, in general, into boasting — at least, not boasting in men, for we know *"love does not envy or boast."* No, if you're going to boast, *"boast in the Lord,"* St. Paul says. Again, *"far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world."*

In our epistle, Paul mentions boasting, and not as a way to proclaim himself, or *"outward appearances,"* but as a way to proclaim *"what is in the heart"* through his preaching, namely faith. For Paul preached Christ, *"that one has died for all, therefore all have died."* St. Peter, too, preached that Christ, *"himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness."* They're not talking about the death that results from the transgression of the first Adam, but our death and resurrection that comes from being incorporated into Christ through Baptism, by being buried with Him by baptism into death and raised up again to walk in newness of life. So St. Paul, as he talks about the promise made to Abraham, says it applies to us, too, righteous through faith in Him *"who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification."* And, of course, *"justification"* is just a fancy word that says, *"God accounts YOU righteous through faith."*

Again, St. Paul continues in our epistle, Jesus *"died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised."* That's more of the same; and then he finishes with *"if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come."* That has baptism in view again, bringing to mind St. Paul's proclamation that He

"saved us ... by the washing of re-creation (regeneration) and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us" and so forth.

Moreover, none of this is done by you; it's all gift. Not even the things you think you do in righteousness. He saved you. It's all grace through faith; not of your works. He made you alive. Stop your boasting. Baptized into Christ? Reborn into the kingdom of God? This is a work of God, the Holy Spirit working through the word in the water to forgive your sins and pull you out of the water into the Holy Ark of Christendom. More gift. Baptized into Christ, you receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Our Old Testament reading highlights this so well. The LORD God is speaking and says to the prophet and to us: *"I myself will take a sprig"* I myself *"will set it out."* *"I [myself] will break off ... a tender one, and I myself will plant it"* *"On the mountain ... will I plant it ..."* *"I bring low ... and [I] make high ..."* *"I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will do it."*

Now in another church, we might get an *"Amen"* or two coming from the congregation about now. Maybe even a *"Hallelujah,"* or a *"Preach it!"* But we Lutherans wouldn't think of doing that ... quietistic, you know? Wouldn't want to call attention to ourselves, right? It's one thing to say or sing, *"Amen,"* when it's written down and everyone is saying it together, but, oh my, to blurt out an *"Amen"*? *"Yes! Yes! It shall be so!"*? We just don't do that! It's not Lutheran!

The sainted Dr. Kenneth Korby, known for restoring other supposedly non-Lutheran practices, would disagree with you. And it's interesting. My sister sent me a blog post, the other day, about an evangelical discovering the benefit of making the sign of the cross. I suggest that if an evangelical can start to make the sign of the cross, Lutherans can step outside their quietistic comfort zone and say, *"Amen!"* For it's this kind of Gospel proclamation, you just heard moments ago, that is especially Lutheran, and for that I say, *"It's good to be a Lutheran."*

Now we Lutherans are especially keen on the primacy of the word of God, for we know, God works through His word to accomplish what He wants done. You know the reformation motto: *Sola gratia. Sola fide. Sola Scriptura.* Scripture alone is that last one! And you may know the Reformation icon with the letters VDMA in it: *Verbum Domini Manet in Aeternum*—the Word of the Lord stands forever!

When radical reformers were using violence to effect reformation, Luther was called back to Wittenberg from the Wartburg Castle where he had been kept safe, and he preached a series of sermons. In one sermon, Luther famously wrote how the Word worked as God's power to convert the sinner and overthrow the tyranny of the papacy. He wrote, *"When the Word took hold of [the] hearts [of the Athenians], they forsook [their idolatries] of their own accord, and in consequence the thing fell of itself. Likewise, if I had seen them holding mass, I would have*

preached to them and admonished them. Had they heeded my admonition, I would have won them; if not, I would nevertheless not have torn them from it by the hair or employed any force, but simply allowed the Word to act and prayed for them. For the Word created heaven and earth and all things [Ps. 33:6]; the Word must do this thing, and not we poor sinners.

“In short,” he continued, “I will preach it, teach it, write it, but I will constrain no man by force, for faith must come freely without compulsion. Take myself as an example. I opposed indulgences and all the papists, but never with force. I simply taught, preached, and wrote God’s Word; otherwise I did nothing. And while I slept [cf. Mark 4:26–29], or drank Wittenberg beer with my friends Philip and Amsdorf, the Word so greatly weakened the papacy that no prince or emperor ever inflicted such losses upon it. I did nothing; the Word did everything.” [LW 51:77]

And so we come to the parables that Jesus teaches us in the Gospel. In the first, the man goes out to scatter seed. He goes to sleep and rises, and, who knows, maybe drinks Wittenberg beer with his friends. And the seed sprouts and grows and bears fruit for the harvest.

So it is with the word of God — and I might add, not just any word, but the Gospel word that is God’s power for salvation. This is the word that sprouts the blade and then the ear and then the full grain in the ear that at the harvest is brought into the barns.

And although all of Scripture is *“profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,”* the Gospel seed is the seed that sprouts faith and bears fruit. This is the Seed that fell to earth from the heavenly places, that died and was planted in the ground. This seed is the seed of woman, a baby conceived of a virgin mother without the aid of a human husband, born in low estate; an infant attended by shepherds; a child fleeing for His life to a foreign country; a child living in obscurity in a little Galilean town; a man attested by God through wondrous signs, and yet a man despised and rejected by the religious leaders, who had Him ruthlessly put to death, to die with criminals and thieves, with mocking and spitting; a man who not only in life but even in death had no place to lay His head, and was laid in a borrowed tomb.

Yes, this humble seed of woman died and was planted in the ground, Jesus said of Himself, and the word about this seed now brings forth the blade, the ear, and the full grain in the ear. Moreover, even more so than with biology, we cannot say how this happens—this faith— except that it’s not by our will, but rather that God does it, and He does it through the seed of the word. As St. Paul says, *“I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.”* Again, *“faith comes by hearing and hearing through the word of Christ.”*

And then this seemingly insignificant seed in Jesus' second parable — this Gospel word of Christ — grows magnificently all on its own. It sends out branches, and we find our home, our nest and our rest in Him. As the Psalmist says, *"The LORD is your keeper; the LORD is your shade on your right hand. The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night. The LORD will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life. The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore."*

So please don't consider this boasting. It's not meant to be. But I am so very thankful that I am a Lutheran — I hope you are, too — thankful that this, the Lord's message whereby He grants faith and life in Christ, is the Lutheran message preached in pulpit upon pulpit in our churches every Sunday. God grant us fidelity to this seed. Grant us growth in Your word and in faith: the blade, the ear, and the full grain on the ear, and finally take us to Yourself in the harvest. You are the Lord; You have spoken through Your Word; Your Word has accomplished Your salvation. And You will bring everything to completion in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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