

As a Lutheran church St. John's is an **EVANGELICAL** church! "Evangelical" comes from the Greek word *euangellion*, which means "Good Message," or, "Gospel." Therefore, to be evangelical means that what we do is based on the Gospel, the Good Message, of Jesus Christ.

The principle core value of Lutheranism is the proclamation of that pure and true Gospel of Jesus Christ as reflected in the primary doctrine of the church: WE ARE SAVED BY THE GRACE OF GOD, FOR CHRIST'S SAKE, THROUGH FAITH ALONE! We believe that our salvation is linked solely to God's grace through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. "*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.*" [Ephesians 2:8-9]

The Augsburg Confession, a statement of our beliefs presented to Emperor Charles the V at the time of the Reformation, proclaims in Article IV, "It is taught that we cannot obtain forgiveness of sin and righteousness before God through our merit, work, or satisfactions, but that we receive forgiveness of sin and become righteous before God out of grace for Christ's sake through faith when we believe that Christ suffered for us and that for his sake our sin is forgiven and righteousness and eternal life are given to us. For God will regard and reckon this faith as righteousness in his sight, as St. Paul says in Romans 3[:21-26] and 4[:5]."

What does being a Gospel-centered community mean for us at St. John's? it means that

- we believe that the teaching on which the Church stands or falls is justification by grace through faith;
 - the way God forgives sin and gives eternal life is through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ;
 - the foundation for all that we do—our preaching, teaching, and living together as a community of believers—must be the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
-

As a Lutheran church St. John's is a **SCRIPTURAL** church. The truth and importance of this core value is taught in the introduction to the *Formula of Concord*, the last of the Lutheran confessional writings in the *Book of Concord*. There it is stated, "We believe, teach, and confess that the only rule and guiding principle according to which all teachings and teachers are to be evaluated and judged are the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments alone, as it is written, 'Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path' (Psalm 119:105)."

We, as Lutherans, celebrate the Reformation principle of "Scripture Alone." That principle reminds us that Holy Scripture is the only source for authoritative teaching. Human authority and reason often try to compete with the divine authority and revelation—but the great check and balance which helps to keep our teaching true and pure is "Scripture Alone."

The Scripture contains two principle teachings—Law and Gospel. All Scriptural preaching and teaching should demonstrate that truth and properly distinguish between Law and Gospel. That distinction is regarded as "an especially glorious light" (*Formula of Concord*) in understanding the whole message God has revealed. As the *Apology to the Augsburg Confession* teaches, "For these are the two chief works of God in human beings, to terrify and to justify the terrified or make them alive. The entire Scripture is divided into these two works. One part is the law, which reveals, denounces, and condemns sin. The second part is the gospel, that is, the promise of grace given in Christ. This promise is constantly repeated through the entire Scripture."

What does being a Scriptural community mean for us at St. John's? It means that

- the only authoritative source for our preaching and spiritual instruction is the revealed and inspired Word of God;
 - we cannot preach or teach anything, no matter how appealing or popular, that is contrary to the revealed Word of God;
 - we cannot promote other sources of information (such as psychology, philosophy, or political thought) as though they were over or equal to the holy Scripture;
 - we take great care to properly distinguish Law and Gospel and to appropriately proclaim them and apply them.
-

As a Lutheran church St. John's is a **SACRAMENTAL** church. This core value of our identity deals with what is called "the means of grace."

The Augsburg Confession, Articles IV and V, states, "It is taught that we cannot obtain forgiveness of sin and righteousness before God through our merit, work, or satisfaction, but that we receive the forgiveness of sin and become righteous before God out of grace for Christ's sake through faith when we believe that Christ has suffered for us and that for his sake our sin is forgiven and righteousness and eternal life are given to us. For God will regard and reckon this faith as righteousness in his sight, as St. Paul says in Romans 3[:21-26] and 4[:5]. **To obtain such faith God instituted the office of preaching, given the gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit who produces faith, where and when he wills, in those who hear the gospel.**"

The proclamation of the Gospel in Word and Sacrament is the "means" by which God's grace is brought to us. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Romans, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because **it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes:** first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith.'" [Romans 1:16-17] He also wrote to the Corinthians, "By this gospel **you are saved**, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain." [1 Corinthians 15:2] In the same letter Paul proclaimed, "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who being saved **it is the power of God.**" [1 Corinthians 1:18]

Concerning Baptism, the Apostle Peter wrote, "In [the ark] only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism **that now saves you also**—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ." [1 Peter 3:20-21]

Concerning the Lord's Supper, the Apostle Matthew wrote, "While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, 'Take and eat; this is my body.' Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many **for the forgiveness of sins.**'" [Matthew 26:26-28]

What does being a sacramental community mean for us at St. John's? It means that

- we believe our public worship to be primarily **DIVINE SERVICE**—that is, God serving his people through the proclamation of the Gospel in Word and Sacrament;
 - we understand, based on Scripture, that the Gospel is the **only** means of Divine grace through which the Holy Spirit is active among us, calling, gathering, enlightening, and strengthening our faith;
 - the means of grace not only form the crux of our public worship, but they are also the source of the Spirit's power for living our lives as the people of God.
-

As a Lutheran church St. John's is a **SACRIFICIAL** church. This core value means that we do good works to the glory of God in response to his sacramental work for us. Jesus tells his followers, ". . . let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven." [Matthew 5:16]

There have always been rumors that Lutherans do not believe in good works. Those rumors have always been false. The earliest formal statement of our Evangelical beliefs is *The Augsburg Confession*. In that declaration we state, "Our people teach that it is necessary to do good works, not that we should count on meriting grace through them but because it is the will of God." What *has* been our emphasis is that the sacrificial life of the Christian must flow from the sacramental work of God—in other words, God saves us through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ; **then** the new person in Christ, with the help of the Holy Spirit, can and should do good works.

Philip Melancthon, the author of *The Augsburg Confession*, defines things very carefully: "A sacrament is a ceremony or work in which God presents to us what the promise joined to the ceremony offers. Thus baptism is not a work that we offer to God, but one in which God . . . offers and presents the forgiveness of sins, etc., according to the promise [Mark 16:16], 'The one who believes and is baptized will be saved.' By contrast, **a sacrifice is a ceremony or work that we render to God in order to give him honor.**" [*The Apology of the Augsburg Confession*] The introduction in the front of our hymnals (page 6) states it this way: "The rhythm of our worship is from [God] to us, and then from us back to him." Our hymns of praise and adoration, our offerings, our thanksgiving prayers are part of our sacrificial response to God's great love in Christ.

Jesus says, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." [Mark 8:34] In that statement he bids us to live sacrificially by loving and helping each other in our families, our circles of friends, our congregation, and our community. So Paul wrote, "We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works," [Ephesians 2:10] and, "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers." [Galatians 6:9-10]

What does being a sacrificial community mean for us at St. John's? It means that

- In response to God's Divine service we offer him our praise, good works, and offerings;
 - We love one another as Jesus has loved us and work together to accomplish the goals of St. John's ministry;
 - We support not only our specific public ministry (that work done by St. John's professional church workers) but as a congregation we also participate in sacrificial service to others through mission offerings, disaster relief, reaching out to our community, serving our neighborhood and supporting social ministry programs (such as PADS, the soup kitchen, Lutheran Church Charities, etc.).
-

As a Lutheran church St. John's is a **CONFESSIONAL** church. This core value refers to the fact that our principle teachings have been stated and defended in a series of documents that confess (that is, make a statement) of our faith. These documents are very important not only for their historical value, but because they are timeless expressions of what Lutherans believe. They do not, of course, have the same authority as Holy Scripture; but we do believe the information they contain to be the true exposition of Holy Scriptures.

The documents which make up the Lutheran Confessions include the three great creeds of Christianity: the Apostles', Nicene, and Athanasian. The first two creeds are used regularly in Lutheran worship as public confessions of our faith. The Athanasian Creed, which is on page 134 in our hymnal, is considerably longer and is sometimes used for public confession on Trinity Sunday. Martin Luther's *Small Catechism*, used in most Lutheran churches for confirmation instruction, is included among the Confessions as well.

As the Reformation unfolded some longer theological works defined the Lutheran understanding of the Scriptures as our teachers were asked again and again to defend our beliefs. The last of these works was *The Formula of Concord*, which was approved in 1579. Since that time the whole collection of our teachings has served well in keeping Lutheranism anchored in those teachings which grow directly out of God's Holy Word.

St. Paul wrote to Timothy, "Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses." [1 Timothy 6:12] Paul here speaks of the confession of faith in Christ Jesus, the same confession we make in our worship, our lives, and our formal declarations of belief.

What does being a confessional church mean for us at St. John's? It means that

- our called, professional church workers will publicly subscribe to the Lutheran Confessions **because** they are the true exposition of the Word of God;
 - when individuals seek formal membership in our congregational they will confess the basics of the Christian faith as they are taught in Luther's *Small Catechism*;
 - we make use of the creeds in our public worship as a communal statement of our acceptance of the historic, apostolic faith;
 - we will not allow any teaching or preaching that is contrary to what is taught in the Lutheran Confessions.
-

As a Lutheran church St. John's is part of the **UNIVERSAL** Church. Luther states in his *Smalcald Articles*, "God be praised, a seven-year-old child knows what the church is: holy believers and 'the little sheep who hear the voice of their shepherd.' This is why children pray this way, 'I believe in one holy Christian church.'"

The Apostle Paul wrote to the church at Corinth, a church that had divided itself many times over, "The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink." [1 Corinthians 12:12-13] This same principle of unity applies to the whole Christian Church, the Body of Christ. Denominations may have honest debates with one another and our differences can be very serious—but our unity in Christ as the Universal Church provides the true foundation for genuine love, respect, and discussion.

This core value also emphasizes the Holy Spirit's work in sustaining the true Church. As we learned from the *Small Catechism*, "[The Holy Spirit] calls, gathers, enlightens, and makes holy the whole Christian church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one common, true faith. Daily in this Christian church the Holy Spirit abundantly forgives all sins—mine and those of all believers."

What does being part of the Universal Church mean for us at St. John's? It means that

- we recognize and celebrate the fact that we are part of something much bigger than just ourselves;
- we are, as we confess in the creeds, part of the one, holy, Christian, Apostolic, Universal Church;
- we are linked together with all Christian believers to "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" [Ephesians 4:5];

- we treat our fellow Christians with appropriate love and respect.
-

As a member of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, St. John's is a **CONGREGATIONAL** church. While many other Lutheran church bodies have retained a hierarchical form of church government, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod determined that each individual congregation would be primarily self-governing. On matters of doctrine and public ministry member congregations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod have consented to walk together. By joining together the congregations do together what they cannot do separately. This includes mission work, training of teachers and pastors, operating a publishing house, and disaster relief.

Individually, however, each congregation is responsible for owning and maintaining its own property, handling its own business affairs, and issuing calls for its own professional church workers. This form of government invests much authority and responsibility in the members of a congregation and it has become a core value that identifies Lutherans in the Missouri Synod.

What does being a congregational church mean for us at St. John's? It means that

- every member of this congregation has the privilege of participating in the governing of the church under the guidelines of God's Word and the congregation's constitution;
 - while called and contracted pastors, teachers, ministers and directors of Christian education are given jurisdiction over certain matters, the authority to handle the congregation's affairs is vested in St. John's Council, boards, committees and Voters' Assembly;
 - there is a "hands on" process for decision making that allows every member to participate in the congregation, to contribute ideas, and to express concerns.
-