

Staying True to Our Roots

Rev. Sean Daenzer

Where are our roots as Lutherans? What is the root of the Lutheran confession? There's more than one way to slice it, but I believe all of the answers matter.

Our roots go back to Adam and the promise of the Seed who crushes the serpent's head. The believing Church in Genesis found immediate persecution when Cain killed Abel in the first worship war. Esau thought his life came from porridge and whatever would keep him alive, rather than the birthright which promised life even beyond death, so he sold it away. Since we have our root in the very first promise of the Gospel right in Genesis, renewed to Abraham, Jacob, Moses, and David throughout the Old Testament, we should remember that God's promises to His Church are to be treasured above all else. Our survival depends on the Lord, not our human church building.

Our roots go back to Jesus Christ Himself, that shoot out of the so-called "stump" of Jesse. If we are true to our roots, we are true to the Seed and the shoot. Christ Jesus must be the center of all our preaching; He must animate all of our work and life, prayer and praise. Our faith justifies and saves because it grasps Christ, who justifies and saves.

Our roots go back to the apostles. We confess one "apostolic" Church because the teaching we hold is that of Christ's apostles. The Lutheran reformers never believed they were starting a new church but claimed to be returning to the older and purer Church of the apostles. The Scriptures, therefore, are our standard. We return always to them, where Christ shines forth as our confidence. The Savior who has redeemed us is also coming again to raise us and give eternal life.



500 Years of the Lutheran Reformation
Southeast Circuit North Dakota District

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Our roots do not skip over the ancient Church after the apostles either. We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We do not think that God's Word ceased to be effective and life-giving, even when bishops and priests had darkened it most. We recognize, in fact, that there have always been Christians and that much of what we have received from them is useful, time-tested, and faithful. Lutherans don't jettison what we've received; we gladly keep it, while always testing and clearing it of everything that conceals Christ and His true teaching.

Our roots do go back to Luther and his fellow reformers. We were first saddled with the name "Lutheran" as a slur. Now, however, we must wear it confidently. Luther himself means very little; what he taught—rooted in everything solid and Christian before him—is everything. We believe it is faithful, pure and simple. Some say we should be "Christian first, Lutheran second." We sincerely reply, "What's the difference?" To be true to our roots is to insist that the Lutheran confession is nothing other than Christianity.

But never to take this for granted! It is not arrogant to believe you have God's truth; it is arrogant to believe you have it naturally, without ever testing, learning, and defending it. "What do you have that you did not receive?" (1 Cor. 4:7). We must know what we believe and why we believe it. This is how we will stay true to our roots and draw life from them. Lutherans draw life through sturdy trunks like the catechism and strong branches like the hymns and prayers from many ages. The Church has and will continue to bear much fruit. But this is due not to Luther, you, or me; it is because of roots dug deep into Christ and His Word, which stand forever. Nevertheless, come, Lord Jesus. Amen.

Next Week: Invitation to 500th Anniversary

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