**The Monthly Newsletter of Good Shepherd Evangelical Lutheran Church**

**Lindy, Nebraska**

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**The Rod and Staff**



**June 2017**

**A Series on the Lutheran Reformation: Martin Luther and the Jews**

We continue this month of June with our series on the Lutheran Reformation. Because the year 1517 is often taken as the symbolic beginning of this time of Reformation, Lutheran churches in our time recognize the year 2017 as the 500th anniversary of this pivotal time in history. Martin Luther and his colleagues in Wittenberg, Germany sought to *reform* the Church of their time by refocusing it on the central message of the faith, which they felt had been obscured by other and unnecessary things. They wanted to refocus the Church on faith in Jesus Christ as savior and our faith in that good news. By placing this faith at the center, they felt that everything else would fall into its proper place.

Yet as hard as it is for us to swallow, every important figure in history has a bit of a dark side and at least one or more skeletons in their closet. How disappointing it is for us to find out that someone we admire also has serious flaws. It is a consequence of living in our sinful and fallen world. All of us, no matter how upright we are, have made mistakes we wish we could take back.

In that spirit, I want to write a bit this month about a dark and embarrassing chapter in the life of Martin Luther: his interaction with Jewish people of his day. Toward the end of his life, Luther made a number of nasty comments about Jews. Because of this 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017, Martin Luther is beginning to receive a lot of press, and this issue of his relationship to Jewish people is often lifted up in an attempt to discredit him. In writing about this, I do not seek to excuse everything Luther wrote about Jews in his day. However, it is important to understand the whole picture.

First, it is important to remember that anti-Jewish attitudes had been present among European Christians for centuries before Martin Luther. When Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire in the late fourth century, Jews (who did not believe that Jesus was divine and therefore their Messiah) found themselves to be a minority. When Jewish communities were mixed in with larger Christian communities, Jews became objects of suspicion. They were falsely accused of all kinds of depraved activities: kidnapping Christian children, poisoning well water in Christian communities, and desecrating the bread used by Christians during Holy Communion. Because many Christians were uncomfortable with the practice of handling money for fear of committing the sin of usury (charging excessive interest), Jews often found work in money-lending, which led them to be unfairly labeled as greedy.

This was the world into which Martin Luther was born and raised. In the early years of his ministry (the 1520s), Luther actually spoke kindly about Jews. In a document entitled *That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew*, he pointed out that Jesus himself was Jewish, and he encouraged Christians to seek to convert Jews to faith in Christ by peaceful means. Luther assumed that once the Church was reformed and purged of unnecessary things that had been added by the Roman Church hierarchy, that Jews would willingly embrace the Christian faith.

However, this did not happen quite so easily. Luther discovered in subsequent years that many Jews had firm convictions about their own faith and were unwilling to abandon it. Some encounters like this provoked Luther’s ire; one must remember that Luther lived long before the time of concern for political-correctness and tolerance. No one in Luther’s day and age was concerned about offending others in the way that we are today. So, in 1543 (only three years before his death), Luther wrote a horrific document entitled *On the Jews and Their Lies*. In it, he lifted up Jews as being responsible for murdering Jesus, and he called for punishments to be inflicted on Jews, up to and including burning their synagogues and houses. Significantly, Luther did not call for Jews themselves to be killed or exterminated, but that reality does little to diminish the harshness of his words.

How do we deal with this? For those of us who call ourselves Lutherans, we need to remember that we do not lift up the figure of Martin Luther as infallible. Luther wrote some very valuable and insightful things about faith, and his writings continue to inspire people today, but we are not obligated to accept everything that Luther wrote. In fact, as I’ve pointed out before, Luther wanted people to call themselves “Christians” or “Evangelicals” rather than “Lutherans.”

Some people claim that Luther, because of his 1543 document, is responsible for the horrible treatment that Jews received in the twentieth century, especially at the hands of the German Nazis in the 1930s and 1940s. However, I believe this is a ridiculous claim. First, as I said, anti-Jewish attitudes existed in Europe long before Martin Luther, and it wasn’t as though he invented such attitudes. Second, there really isn’t any evidence that later generations of Lutherans in Germany placed special importance on Luther’s writings on the Jews. They were aware of his writings, but for the most part ignored them. If Luther’s writings on the Jews had been extremely influential over the years, then one would expect that Germany would have been the worst place for Jewish people to live. However, in the time before the Nazis, Germany was actually one of the most hospitable countries in Europe for Jews to live.

This leads to one final and important point. Some people claim that Luther was *anti-Semitic* because of his attitude toward the Jews, but this is misleading and simply wrong. The term *anti-Semitic* comes from the nineteenth century (a few hundred years after Luther) and refers to the belief that Jewish people are bad because they possess inferior *ethnic* qualities. Anti-Semites, such as the Nazis of the twentieth century, did not care about the religious affiliation of people involved. Even if a Jewish person was a believing Christian, Nazis still persecuted and killed them.

Luther was not anti-Semitic. He could be said to have been *anti-Judaism*, however. Luther’s anger at Jews stemmed from their unwillingness to accept the Christian faith. Luther believed that any religious system that encouraged people to trust in themselves and their own righteousness came from the devil, and Luther considered the Jewish religion one of those along with Islam as well as various distortions of Christianity. So, although Nazis reprinted some of Luther’s writings about Jews as a part of their propaganda, Luther was not anti-Semitic. For him, if a Jewish person converted to Christianity, that person was a Christian. For him, it was a matter of faith, not ethnicity.

We are rightly horrified at Luther’s words about Jews, even when we understand them correctly. It’s easy to fall into extremes when talking about famous people, or anyone, actually: either they’re wonderful or they’re horrible. But this is not reality, even with someone like Martin Luther.

* Pr. T. E. Jacobson

**Special Announcements**

* There will be a bridal card shower for Joe and Randi Jessen. Please leave cards at the church by June 18. There is a box on one of the tables in the fellowship hall.
* As mentioned last month, the updated instructions for Altar and Communion Set Up will be posted soon and distributed.
* Sunday June 4 will be the festival of Pentecost and also the first Communion for Jake Eckmann. Pentecost remembers the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the twelve apostles of Jesus and therefore the beginning of the Christian Church.
* A special “thank you” from Pr. Tom: Many thanks for your prayers as I underwent my surgery on May 18! The hernia repair I had done is fairly routine, one of the more common surgeries in our country, but it was definitely a “first” for me. Such situations, when we place ourselves in the care of others, remind us that we are always called to place ourselves in the care of God, “who neither slumbers nor sleeps” (Psalm 121). Thankfully, I am over the worst of the recovery, and though still a bit tender, am back on my feet.

**Commemoration of the Saints**

Lutherans do not venerate (pray to) special people called “saints.” Our Lutheran confessional documents speak against that practice. However, those same documents that prohibit the veneration of saints encourage Christian people to look to the lives of significant Christians of the past as a source of encouragement for our lives in the present.

For June of 2017, we remember **Philipp Melanchthon**, Martin Luther’s younger colleague in Wittenberg, Germany.

Philipp Melanchthon was especially gifted in the area of language, and he is responsible for teaching Luther much of the Greek language, which enabled Luther to translate the New Testament into German. At the same time, Melanchthon was more systematic and less brash that Martin Luther, and he sought out ways to build bridges with Christians of other perspectives. In Wittenberg today, the town square has statues of both Luther and Melanchthon. Whereas Luther’s statue has a quote from Jesus in Mark chapter 1 where he says “Believe in the gospel,” Melanchthon’s statue has a quote from the New Testament letter of Ephesians about “maintaining the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.” Melanchthon was the author of the *Augsburg Confession* of 1530, which remains today as the primary Lutheran statement of faith. He also wrote what became known as the first Lutheran theological textbook, and for that reason became known as “The Teacher of Germany.”

* Pr. T. E. Jacobson

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**Worship Schedule**

**June 4:** Day of Pentecost with Holy Communion at altar rail (Red)

**June 11:** Sunday of the Holy Trinity (White)

**June 18:** Second Sunday after Pentecost with Holy Communion continuous line (Green)

**June 25:** Third Sunday after Pentecost (Green)

**Father’s Day**

As with Mother’s Day, which was observed in May, June 18 is Father’s Day. We remember that the call to be a faithful father is a sacred calling from God. Martin Luther once referred to family as “the first government,” for it is in families that children are nurtured and formed and who go on to contribute to the health of society.

**Featured Hymn for June 2017**

***All Who Believe and Are Baptized***

*Lutheran Hymnal for Church and Home, 75*

1. All who believe and are baptized shall see the Lord’s salvation; baptized into the death of Christ, they are a new creation; through Christ’s redemption they will stand among the glorious heavenly band of every tribe and nation.
2. With one accord, O God, we pray, grant us your Holy Spirit; help us in our infirmity through Jesus’ blood and merit; grant us to grow in grace each day by holy baptism, that we may, eternal life inherit.

* Thomas H. Kingo, 1634-1703, trans. George T. Rygh, 1860-1943

*Note: Danes and Norwegians used this hymn for baptisms for many years. At the beginning of the first stanza, the baptismal party would enter the church and process down the aisle. After the baptism, as the congregation sang the second stanza, the party would process out of the church.*

**Monthly Watchword for June 2017**

“We must obey God rather than men.”

* Acts 5:29 ESV

**Ushers for June:**

* Head Ushers:
  + Galen and Jamie Guenther
* Ushers:
  + Richard and Phyllis Beckmann
  + Jerry and Sandy Ziegler
  + Dennis and Judy Friedrichsen
  + Trenton Guenther

**For Further Information on LCMC and the NALC:** You can download and read the newsletters of both organizations at the following addresses:

* **http://www.lcmc.net/newsletters**
* **http://thenalc.org/newsletter/**

**Website:** The web address is as follows:

* **www.gselclindy.weebly.com**

**Some Quotes from Martin Luther:**

“To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing.”

“One Christian who has been tried is worth a hundred who have not been tried, for the blessing of God grows in trials. He who has experienced them can teach, comfort, and advise many in bodily and spiritual matters.”

“Just as there is no fire without heat and smoke, so there is no faith without love.”

“To serve God properly means that everyone stay in his calling, however humble it may be, and first heed the Word of God in church, then the word of the government, superiors, or parents, and then live accordingly.”

**From Martin Luther’s Small Catechism:**

**Prayer before Eating**

*When children and all members of the household gather at the table, they are to reverently fold their hands and pray: “The eyes of all wait upon you, O Lord, and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing. (Based on Psalm 145:15-16). Then they are to pray the Lord’s Prayer and the following prayer: “Lord God, heavenly Father, bless us and these your gifts, which we receive from your bountiful goodness, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.*

**June 2017**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Sun | Mon | Tue | Wed | Thu | Fri | Sat |
|  |  |  |  | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 4  Worship, 10:30 with Holy Communion (altar rail)  Day of Pentecost  Red | 5 | 6 | 7  Pr. Tom in Lindy | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| 11  Worship, 10:30  The Holy Trinity  White | 12 | 13 | 14  Pr. Tom in Lindy  Council meeting, 7:00 PM | 15 | 16 | 17 |
| 18  Worship, 10:30 with Holy Communion (continuous line)  Green | 19 | 20 | 21  Pr. Tom in Lindy  Women’s meeting, 10:00 AM | 22 | 23 | 24 |
| 25  Worship, 10:30  Green | 26 | 27 | 28 29 30  Pr. Tom in Lindy | | | |
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Good Shepherd Evangelical

Lutheran Church of Lindy

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