

“He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

It may be brown; it may be red. Many of them are blue, although the newest ones are burgundy and black. Some may be only a few pages; others may number several hundred pages. What is it? It is Luther’s Small Catechism, that wonderful summary of biblical teaching set forth in the six chief parts of Christian doctrine. There are four books which should be used in every Lutheran home. They are the Bible, of course; the hymnal, the Confessions and the Catechism. (By the way, if you don’t have a catechism or would like one, please speak to Pastor or Deaconess) It is hard to find someone who was confirmed in a Lutheran Church who has not studied the Catechism. It was Luther’s pastoral heart that moved him to write the catechism. After a series of visits by Luther and his colleagues to the congregations in Saxony to assess their spiritual health, Luther was horrified. He said: *“The deplorable, miserable condition which I discovered lately when I, too, was a visitor, has forced and urged me to prepare this Catechism, or Christian doctrine, in this small, plain, simple form. Mercy! Good God! what manifold misery I beheld! The common people ... have no knowledge whatever of Christian doctrine, and, alas! many pastors are altogether incapable, and incompetent to teach. Nevertheless, all maintain that they are Christians.... Yet they cannot recite either the Lord’s Prayer, or the Creed, or the Ten Commandments, they live like dumb brutes and irrational swine.”* (Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions, p. 310)

One of the greatest blessings of the Catechism is found in Luther’s explanation of the Second Article of the Apostles’ Creed, which we will use as our confession of faith later in our worship. Luther’s explanation helps us to see everything that is ours through faith in Christ. In his explanation, Luther tells us *who* Christ is: **“I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord.”** He tells us *what* Jesus has done: **“He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil.”** *How* did Jesus do this? **“not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death.”** Finally, we come to *why* did Christ do this? **“that I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness.”** And how can I be sure of this wonderful truth? **“just as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity. This is most certainly true.”**

Our Epistle lesson today well serves as the basis of Luther’s comments. It is the recap of all that Christ has done for us as His beloved children. In the fuller context of our sermon text, we learn that **“[Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.”** (Colossians 1:15-20, ESV)

On this last Sunday of the church year, we look to the fulfilment of all that God has promised to His people. To use Luther’s words from the explanation of the Second Article: *Christ has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person. . . that I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness.* How blessed we are to know that we, who have been slaves to sin under Satan’s cruel tyranny have been brought into the glorious kingdom of light and life through Jesus Christ, the King who was willing to do all things for His people!

Year after year there are tens of thousands of people who want to immigrate to Canada. What is it that draws them? It isn’t the climate! It is the hope that in this land they will have freedom and be able to build a better life for themselves. Many of those who seek to come here have lived under oppressive regimes; they have not only had bad rulers, they have suffered under power-hungry and inhumane tyrants. Many face religious persecution far beyond anything we have ever experienced. We, as a congregation are sponsoring a family in need—a family suffering under a cruel regime. But if they, and so many like them can live in Canada, they can leave behind those other nations with their terrors, troubles and tyranny. They will have a peace and safety they never felt in their native lands.

We should thank God that we have not had to live under the cruel tyranny of an oppressive regime. We know that life in Canada is not without its problems. There are no perfect earthly kingdoms. Yet few of us have had to live in a land where human rights are violated more than they are kept. Our leaders are far from perfect, but there is still the rule of law in the land which provides a decent measure of protection to all citizens, which has given opportunity for commerce and culture, and which makes Canada a good place to live.

Now we hear the promise that the Holy Spirit made known to St. Paul: ***“Christ has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”*** God gives us hope in the midst of all the imperfect kingdoms of this world. It is not the vain hope that we are sold at election time, that if we elect this party or that party they will have the answers for the ills of the nation. Rather, it is the hope that comes in the victory of our God over the very power of darkness and evil. In the face of all imperfect kingdoms, including Satan's evil reign through sin and death, our God has brought us into His Kingdom, that perfect kingdom, where we can, and will, enjoy life in all its fulness under the gracious rule of our Saviour and our God.

Christ has redeemed you, me and all lost and condemned persons who turn to Him. Sometimes we don't think about the devil's tyranny or the true darkness of his dominion; after all, there are times when it doesn't seem all that bad. We think that we are free people, with free will. We do what we want, when we want. But do not be deceived. We are sinners, and as sinners, we are slaves in Satan's dominion of darkness. While it may seem that we enjoy a relatively peaceful life, the devil, like any tyrant, can and does change that in an instant. Worst of all, the day comes when the slaves of sin in this world will find out what life in Satan's realm is really like, as death brings us into the eternal torment of hell. Try as hard as we like, we cannot free ourselves from this kingdom. We cannot immigrate or escape. Unless someone is able to overthrow the devil and destroy his power, we are going to be stuck in the sorrow and the torment of this kingdom of evil.

That, dear people loved by God, is precisely the good news that Paul brings us in our text. Christ has overthrown the devil. Christ has destroyed his power over us. We have a Saviour, a Rescuer, a Redeemer. And that redeemer is Jesus Christ. In our Gospel lesson we see our King doing what no other king would do for people. On the cross Christ opposed the devil and all his evil. He faced the full fury of the dominion of darkness and destroyed it through His selfless sacrifice of His life for the lives of all people. Jesus did not die in vain as some people think. His death brought forgiveness to us all, the forgiveness that takes away sin, and with it the tyranny that sin brings into our lives. And in His resurrection, Jesus destroyed Satan's empire once and for all. Death, hell, sin and Satan are vanquished. They can oppress us no more. We have been delivered from that kingdom, and brought into the kingdom of Christ. In ancient times people who were conquered by another nation would be carried away as slaves, far from the freedom of their homeland. Christ has transferred us into His Kingdom—not as slaves, but as beloved children. Paul says Christ has delivered us. He rescued us. He brought us out of the dominion of darkness. He delivers us from the hopelessness of all earthly kingdoms to bring us into true freedom in His kingdom. This is why Paul can say: ***“So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.”*** (Ephesians 2:19, ESV)

And so Luther reminds us that Christ *who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature; purchased and won me from all sins, from death and from the power of the devil—not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and His innocent suffering and death; so that I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness, even as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity.* By His grace, we now live under His gracious rule. Peter put it this way: ***“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”*** (1 Peter 2:9, ESV) Freed from sin's power, we are not to let it rule over us again. We live as citizens of His kingdom, serving Him, not out of fear, but out of love and thanksgiving. We live under Him as Lord of the Church, remembering that all we do we do for the honour and glory of our King. We come and worship to be in the presence of our King. We study His word in Sunday School and bible classes, both to know Him better, and to understand our life in His kingdom better. We work together as fellow citizens for the good of the church and its members, but also to let the world know what this King has done that all people might be part of His kingdom now and forever. In all we do, our gracious King is at work, giving us the power, the strength and the resources to accomplish His purpose. He will continue to be with us and bless our work together in His kingdom, until He comes again in His glory to take us to that eternal kingdom of heaven.

While we live in this world, we will have to live under human rulers who are far from perfect. In the leaders of the world we tend to see men and women who are more eager to serve themselves than the citizens under them. But even while we live in this world, we have a good King, a righteous King, a heavenly King. This King rules and serves for the good of His subjects. What other ruler today do you know who would willingly die for the sake of His subjects? What ruler would rule all things for

the sake of his people? Our King does this—and so much more. He has done all that is necessary to qualify us for life in His kingdom. He has brought us into the joy of full citizenship in that blessed dominion. And He will continue to rule benevolently and lovingly out of concern and care for even the least of His subjects. His kingdom shall have no end! Thankfully, that means that we will know the blessings of life in that kingdom for ever and ever. Amen.