

Why I am a Lutheran

Evelyn's Path to the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

DRB: When did you become a Missouri Synod Lutheran?

EEB: Officially, I was questioned and admitted into a congregation of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) on Easter morning of 2006; however, God had been converting my heart since the fall of the prior year.

DRB: What denominations were you involved with before becoming a Lutheran?

EEB: I was raised in and regularly attended a small, Southern Baptist church from infancy until I was in the fifth grade. I did not go to church much for the remaining time I lived at home. After graduating high school and going to college, I fellowshiped (but did not join) a Presbyterian Church of America (PCA) congregation for about four or five years. After graduating college, I moved away from home, officially joined a PCA church, and worshiped there for three years. I got married and since my husband was an elder at a congregation of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, I transferred my membership there for about a year. We moved to the Midwest, so we joined a congregation of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and worshiped there for about a year before we left to pursue joining the Lutheran Church.

DRB: What teaching of Christ is crucial to the Lutheran Church, but much less important to the denominational churches of your background?

EEB: I think every other church I attended in the past chose to briefly skim over, disregard, or nullify our physical existence. By this, I mean that they de-emphasized the physical existence of man and, in my opinion, over-emphasized the emotional and supernatural experiences man could (and in some cases "should") have. Until attending a LCMS church, I had never been clearly taught (both in Bible classes and by example) that the body itself was so important that Christ healed the bodies of people with whom he interacted and that he came to redeem the souls

and bodies of future children of God. I had been told our bodies would be resurrected on the last day and that no more pain or sin would be involved, but every other church focused more on the emotional aspects of the body's resurrection (e.g., we'll be reunited with loved ones with no more tears and live in a joy-filled bliss, etc.) rather than balancing the emotional with the physical.

DRB: How has that difference in emphasis impacted your faith in the gospel, that is, the good news that Mary's Son conquered death and hell?

EEB: Initially, I was plagued with guilt and scared to dare to think that I could rejoice over my body being made complete again in heaven. I had always been taught that the flesh and things associated with it were my grossly evil enemies that were to be denied, resisted, and disciplined even unto death. Though those things are not necessarily false statements and many are based on God's word, I think the negative emphasis on the flesh inhibited me from really looking forward to being with Christ in heaven and appreciating both his resurrection from the dead and his promises of resurrection for his church. Though I do not fully understand what it will be like, I have come to savor the words of Christ concerning his kingdom and future Advent more personally, deeply, and fully than ever before and to truly regard his words and works as "good news," especially 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14: "But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep."

DRB: It sounds like what you have heard in the Lutheran Church helped you distinguish between *flesh* as the fallen sinful nature from *flesh* as the created, physical body. The Word became flesh (John 1:14) in the second sense in order to be made sin for us, and yet without committing sin (2 Corinthians 5:21). As our pastor said on Christmas Eve, Jesus was not born of a virgin to

free us from our bodies, but to free our bodies from sin. That is why he reigns as both God and man to restore everything the Serpent had destroyed in the Garden until the last enemy, death, is put under Christ's feet (Genesis 3; Matthew 28; 1 Corinthians 15). Beyond differences in emphasis, how do the denominations interpret Scripture in a way that actually denies the faith of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod?

EEB: Simply put, the denominations choose to use man's reasoning over God's word. To elaborate, beliefs about Christ's last supper and baptism are the main two interpretations I can think of that are different in every other church I can think of. The Lutheran Church claims God's body is present in the Lord's Supper. The Lutheran Church also claims that baptism is for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38). Though the Roman Catholic Church believes the same things, it also believes the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper will remain merely physical objects unless they have the proper things done to them by a priest so they can be transubstantiated. According to the Roman Catholic Church, baptism is only for the sins one has committed prior to being baptized. After baptism, any "mortal" sins a person is guilty of are no longer forgiven through the baptism. In other denominations, the bread and wine (or grape juice) are said to be mere symbols of his body and blood, and the idea that God's presence can be both in these physical substances and at other places is flatly denied. These denominations also claim that baptism is to be done as a symbol of forgiveness. Conversely, Lutherans do not deny the ability of Christ's body to be in simple substances such as bread and wine. As a result, interpreting the words Christ stated in Matthew 26:26-28 ("Take, eat; this is my body..." and "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins") in any way other than literally denies the clarity of Scripture and opposes the teachings and beliefs of the Lutheran Church. Lutherans also believe that [baptizing in the name of the triune God forgives sins](#): "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). Baptism is not a "dedication" to the church or merely an aspect of the Law to be done because of Christ's command in Matthew's gospel (28:19)

to "baptiz[e] them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

DRB: How has simply believing what Christ taught about the Lord's Supper made a difference in your life? In what other ways has believing the Scriptures instead of human interpretations been important in your own struggle against the world, the flesh, and the devil?

EEB: I think that once a seed of doubt is planted in the mind, a tree of doubt can grow in little time. By believing the Scriptures to be both true and clearly read and interpreted (even by the simplest of minds such as my own), I see that I do not doubt my salvation as often or as strongly as I once did. By thinking that the passages on baptism and the Lord's Supper were to be interpreted symbolically, I wondered what other Scriptures were supposed to be interpreted symbolically. As a result, I always felt a pressing, urgent need to hear a variety of scholarly pastors and read a large array of books on Scripture and the Christian life so that I could learn from these sources and have them interpret Scripture for me. I hoped that by doing these things (notice the emphasis on *my doing*), I could then understand more symbolism I had not been taught and be sure I understood what varying passages in the Scriptures really meant. Believing the Scriptures are clear has helped me in two ways. First, I trust that Christ's teaching that the kingdom of God is to be inherited by meek, small, and unlearned children applies to me as well. Second, believing the Scriptures has helped me boast less in my own learning and rely more strongly on Christ's work on my behalf. These two ways have helped me to trust in God's promises through his word and not look to myself as I struggle with my sinful nature and am tempted by Satan to wander from the truth housed therein.

DRB: What are some examples of passages you can now simply believe without wondering if they are symbolic? That is, what words of Christ have convinced you that the Lutheran Church teaches the true gospel, [the joyous news of Christ's victory over sin and the curse](#), as opposed to the false gospels of the denominations?

EEB: I can simply believe John 3:16 now without adding any human interpretations to it. ("For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but

have eternal life.") I had been taught that the "world" that was referred to in the passage was only the elect God chose and not the entire world's peoples. Thus, "world" was symbolic for God's elect. Now, I can simply believe that when the word reads "world" it means just that, saint *and* sinner. Because God loved all people and wanted them to believe on his son and give those who believe life, I do not doubt the sincerity of Jesus' pleas in the gospel of Matthew (11:28) for people to come unto him so he would give them rest ("Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"), and his longing for the people of Jerusalem to be gathered together under his care in Matthew 23:37: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!"

DRB: If the Lutheran Church says God really was in Christ reconciling the whole world to himself (2 Corinthians 5:18-19; 1 John 2:2; 1 Timothy 2:1-6), then does it also say salvation comes, at least in part, through a human decision?

EEB: The LCMS does *not* say salvation comes from man in any way, but rather adheres to the Bible. In 2 Corinthians 5:18, the Bible is very clear that man makes no decision to gain salvation, but God gives it: "All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation." The Bible is also very clear in 1 Timothy 2:5 that no decision is needed because "...there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." Thus, salvation does not come in any part by man's will or decision but by God's will through Christ Jesus.

DRB: Many would say that where each Christian chooses to worship is a personal decision that should be based on his or her own needs, personality, and gifts. Would you agree?

EEB: No. The Bible flatly contradicts these ideas over and over, whether our ears and eyes want to admit this or not. Though I do not wish to nullify the importance of stewarding the gifts and personalities God has given us in this life, these

gifts are means by which God works and *not* to be used as our guide; the *Bible* is our guide! I think we Americans (even the most passive) can become resentful and hostile if we are not given the freedom of choice about something. However, I think this idea of our worship being our "choice" comes from an incorrect, unbiblical teaching of "free will." Clearly, the Bible repetitively states that God's work for man was not done because man asked God to do anything for him; God chose to work on man's behalf even before time began—while man was unaware and unable to ask God to help. God also specified how, when, where, by whom, and in what manner he would both reveal Himself and be worshiped; man, as the book of Job clearly states, was not consulted or given an option in the matters therein. As created rather than creator, we, in turn, are left with no "choice" of how to worship. All created beings will worship the triune God, albeit those who will spend eternity in hell will not do so until the last day on bended knee.

I do want to be clear that the gifts, personality, and needs of people are not to be dismissed or disregarded. These aspects of people differentiate them from others and diversify the body of Christ; however, my point is that these aspects of a person should not be the guiding principle by which a person should choose a church or the emphasis of a church's worship; the proper interpretation of the Bible should be the guide for worship.

DRB: It sounds like you might also disagree with the following statement. *Whether or not a church rightly interprets the gospel does not really matter as long as it encourages good works and teaches that one must be "saved" or "born again."*

EEB: You're right; this is a scheme conceived in the pit of hell! Satan would have us believe that we can all "get along" outside of heaven. To think such thoughts nullifies the serious depravity of sin. This statement, and those like it, would sideswipe the believer into thinking that we all aren't really dead-in-sins people and puffs our egos into thinking we are in no need of instruction. It implies that all humans are basically good and rational and contradicts the Bible's many statements and teachings over the ages against false teachers who would sway people from the truth of God. As Jesus addressed people of his day in Matthew 7:11, even "evil [men] know how to

give good gifts to [their] children" (i.e., do good works). Thus, saying that good works could be evidence that a church should be joined can open the door for other religions that flatly *deny* Christ as God and Savior of the world. If this were true, every non-Christian religion that exists (such as Islam, Buddhism, Animism, etc.) could sway people to join due to the "good" works done by its members.

In the same vein, many non-Christian religions claim a "rebirth" is needed; some, such as Buddhism, even go so far as to emphasize that many reincarnations of the body are necessary. Unfortunately, these same religions continue to place the emphasis of man's salvation in his own hands. As a result, man is left in a continual cycle to do more and more good works with no guarantee that he's ever done enough to merit heaven.

In regard to those churches that claim to be Christian but operate under this philosophy, I think it is against Scripture to subscribe to it. Though it is true that God saves people without considering the name or denomination of the church they attend, he does not save people without using his whole, infallible word (Romans 10:17). Thus, for his word to save, it must be interpreted correctly, not heretically, just as 2 Peter 2:1 states: "But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction." Churches who listen to these false interpretations of the gospel fit the description in 2 Timothy 4:3-4, "For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths."

DRB: Are there Christians who believe the true gospel even though they are members of false churches, or do only Lutherans go to heaven?

EEB: Lutherans will not be the only people who go to heaven. The church, according to Christ, is

comprised of persons who believe that Christ's life and death guaranteed them forgiveness of their sins and reconciled them to God. Though it is unfortunate that false churches exist, it is possible that a person may attend a false church and still believe the true gospel.

DRB: If, in a church that contradicts the true gospel, enough of it may be heard for God to grant faith, then why is it important to join a Lutheran Church, where the gospel is proclaimed in its purity and where baptism and the Lord's Supper are rightly administered?

EEB: Because false teachers and interpretations can lead to damnation, one must diligently search to find a church where both the gospel is proclaimed diligently and truthfully and the Lord's Supper and baptism are administered correctly.

DRB: What books have been helpful for your understanding the gospel, the Lord's Supper, and baptism better?

EEB: From the Bible, the Gospels of John and Matthew and the epistles of Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Romans have been helpful. Also, Klemet Preus' book *The Fire and the Staff* and [Martin Luther's *Small Catechism*](#) have been helpful. (I'm working on making it through Luther's *Large Catechism*, so I can't claim it in its entirety yet, but I have benefited and learned much from the small portions I've read so far.)

DRB: In summary, what led you to enter into communion with the body of Christ in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod?

EEB: I joined a congregation of the LCMS because I believe it is a church where God's word is faithfully and correctly proclaimed and where baptism and the Lord's Supper are administered properly.

DRB: The Lord be with you.

EEB: And also with you.

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Posted on Epiphany of 2007 to dawningrealm.org primarily for family and friends but also for others interested. We thank Pastor Kevin Johnson for taking the time to thoroughly catechize us in the faith.

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