

Theology in the Sanctuary

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Redeemer Evangelical Lutheran Church
Los Alamos, NM

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www.redeemerlosalamos.org

*A Member Congregation of the
Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod*

The Evangelical Lutheran Church believes, teaches, and confesses that the same LORD who gave the promise to Abraham and redeemed the people of Israel from Egypt is the same LORD who has brought redemption to all mankind. For this reason, the church confesses the words of Isaiah declaring, ***"Our Redeemer—the LORD of hosts is his name—is the Holy One of Israel."*** (Isaiah 47:4, ESV) In this way, it is most fitting for our congregation to be named Redeemer Evangelical Lutheran Church. We believe that Jesus Christ alone is our Redeemer. By His death on the cross He has redeemed us from the power of sin, death, and the devil. As those who trust in Jesus Christ alone for salvation we are the redeemed.

The theological art that is utilized in our sanctuary depicts the person and work of Jesus Christ our Redeemer. Over our altar we have placed a crucifix in order to reinforce our conviction that Jesus has redeemed us by His death on the cross. St. Paul writes, ***"Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"—so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith."*** (Galatians 3:13-14, ESV) Christ has redeemed us with His precious blood and with His innocent suffer and death. The redemption of all humanity is accomplished in the crucifixion of Christ. St. Paul also says, ***"For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."*** (1 Corinthians 1:18, ESV) For this reason, the crucifix is located as the focal point of our sanctuary.



While the crucifix emphasizes the work of redemption, the stained glass window emphasizes the person of Christ as our Redeemer who lives and reigns to all eternity.

In the Old Testament scriptures Job confesses, ***"For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. My heart faints within me!"*** (Job 19:25-27, ESV) Although we did not see the resurrected Christ with our own eyes, the stained glass window will continually remind us of the hope that we have. As we gather to hear the voice of the Good Shepherd here in time, we confess with Job saying, "I know that my Redeemer lives and one day in my resurrected body I shall see Him for myself."

The image of the resurrected Christ testifies that the redemption upon the cross has been completed. As St. Paul teaches us, “[Jesus] was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.” (Romans 4:24-25, ESV) His death is the payment for the sin of the world. His life is the absolution of the world. All of our sins have been forgiven. Theologically and architecturally, the contrast between the plain wood of the crucifix and the brilliant colors of the window are striking. The body on the cross is lifted up in order to draw all people to Him while the living Christ in the window stands upon the earth just like Job said to invite all people to come to Him. The death of Jesus was a dark day filled with mourning. The resurrection of Jesus was a day of light filled with joy. The placement of the window over the altar will allow for rays of sunlight to illuminate the space with the brilliance of colored glass. In this space, we can confidently say, “I believe that Christ has redeemed me and I know that my Redeemer lives!”



The crucifixion and resurrection of Christ go together. You can't have one without the other. If Christ has not been raised, then our faith is futile. If Christ had not been crucified, then our debt still stands. After the day of Pentecost, the Apostles began to proclaim the message of salvation, namely, that Christ has died for us and Christ has risen for us.

Therefore, theologically and architecturally, the placement of the double image of the crucifixion and the resurrection at the central point of the sanctuary is most appropriate. These images declare the teaching of the Apostles. The image of the cross is the symbol of the death of Christ. The title plate at the top of the cross explains why He was put to death. It reads, “INRI” which stands for Jesus of Nazareth King of the Jews. The long awaited King was rejected. The people turned their backs on Him. Yet, God has not turned His back upon humanity. Thus, the Resurrected Christ in the window faces those who have gathered at the foot of the cross with welcoming arms. At His feet are planted a row of Easter lilies. Just as a bulb is placed into the earth for a time, the body of Jesus was laid in the tomb for a time. Then when it is spring, the lilies burst forth from the earth and show forth their glory. Likewise, after three days, the Son of Man burst forth from the tomb to show forth His glory.



The crucifixion of Jesus is commonly referred to as Christ being hung on a tree (See Acts 5:29-32; 10:39-43; 13:26-31) . Now we know that a cross is made out of wood from a dead tree. Theologically, we can't help but make the connection between a tree being cut down and Jesus being cut off from His people. We can't help but see death in a piece of wood. If you cut a branch off, it dies. In the act of crucifixion, a dead tree is used as an instrument to bring death. On the other hand, a living tree, especially one that bears fruit, brings life.

In the Garden of Eden, there was a tree that gave life. However, when man fell into sin death was brought into creation. The wages of sin is death. In this act of rebellion, humanity broke fellowship with God. Moses tells us, "**[God] He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.**" (Genesis 3:24, ESV) Punishment was given and the benefits of the tree of life were taken away.

However, in the atonement upon the cross, Jesus has restored creation. He is making all things new. As *Genesis* opens with paradise lost, the book of *Revelation* closes with paradise gained. Through the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ fellowship with God has been declared and the people of God are brought back to the tree of life. In the book of *Revelation* St. John writes, "**He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.**" (Revelation 2:7, ESV)



Thus, through the body of Jesus suspended upon the tree of death humanity is brought back to the tree of life. In one of the prayers of thanksgiving used in the Divine Service, we acknowledge that in God's righteous judgment He condemned the sin of Adam and Eve when they ate the forbidden fruit. They were justly barred from the tree of life. In God's mercy, salvation was promised through Jesus the second Adam. His cross has become a life-giving tree for those who trust in Him (*Lutheran Service Book*, p. 209). This prayer is spoken prior to the words of the institution of the Lord's Supper. After the distribution of the Sacrament of the Altar, the pastor declares that the body and blood of Christ

are given to us to strengthen us in body and in soul (*Lutheran Service Book*, p. 164). For this reason, it is most fitting to have the crucifix over the altar.

In the stained glass window, our Risen Redeemer stands upon the new earth in front of the tree of life. Theologically and architecturally, the connection between the tree of death and the tree of life is made clear. Jesus does not stand in front of the tree to guard the way that leads to life. Instead, He stands in our midst to invite us to partake, "Take and eat. Take and drink." Here we partake of the very body and very blood of our Lord Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of our sins. Where there is forgiveness, there is life and salvation. As we gather in the fellowship of this altar, we have a foretaste of the feast to come and we celebrate with the Lamb in His kingdom now.

As with other teachings of Scripture, there is a paradox. Jesus is both the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world and also the Priest of God who absolves the world. As the sacrifice, Christ has been crucified on the cross. He has died. As the High Priest, Christ is in the presence of the Father. He lives. In this role as High Priest, He continues to intercede for us as His people.

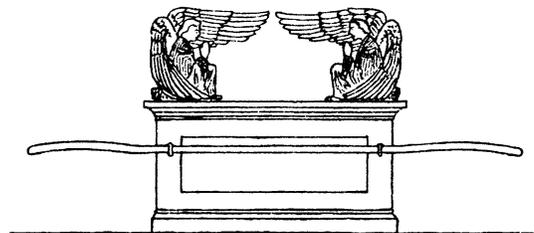


Theologically and architecturally, this paradox is represented in the image of the sacrificed Christ next to the image of Christ the Eternal High Priest. On the crucifix, the hands are extended heavenward. In the window, the hands are extended toward those who dwell on earth. As Jesus offered Himself up on the cross, His hands were lifted up to the heavens in a sacrificial act. As Jesus offers the benefits of the sacrifice from the altar, His hands are extended to those who have gathered in the Divine Service in a sacramental act. The open hands of Jesus show forth the giving of His holy gifts in the distribution from the altar. These images over the altar show forth the connection we have between the Old Testament and the New Testament. Under the Old Testament, the flesh of the sacrificed animal, wheat, and wine were placed upon the burning altar. The blood of the sacrifice was sprinkled on the horns of the altar. Now under the New Testament, rather than offering continual sacrifices on the altar, the completed sacrifice of the true body and the true blood of Jesus, along with the bread and the wine, are given to us from the altar to eat and to drink. On the night in which our Lord was betrayed, He gave His disciples the New Testament in His

blood. In our day, the Resurrected Christ is truly present in our midst giving to us these great gifts. The stained glass window testifies to this invisible reality that cannot be seen with physical eyes.

The image of the resurrected Christ has been an important theological and artistic component in the architecture of the church since early times. The use of visible images helps to teach the people of God the invisible reality that cannot be seen but can only be believed. In the days of the Old Testament, it was strictly forbidden to make an image of the invisible divine essence of God. Thus, the LORD instructed His people to build a tabernacle. Outside of the tabernacle, the main altar and font

for ritual washing was placed. Inside the tabernacle, there was a menorah, a table for the bread of the presence, and the incense altar. Behind the veil in the most holy place, the Ark of the Covenant was kept. On the top of the Ark of the Covenant, the images of two cherubim were placed. This visible aid directed the



people of God to the place where the LORD was present in their midst. The LORD was enthroned upon the wings of the cherubim. As God, the LORD is present everywhere. Yet, the tabernacle and most specifically the Ark of the Covenant taught the people where the LORD their Redeemer promised to be present for their benefit.

In the New Testament, the invisible divine essence of God has assumed flesh and blood. The Second Person of the Holy Trinity has become man. We confess that Jesus was begotten of the

Father from eternity and was born of the Virgin Mary at the proper time. He continues to be truly man forever. For the sake of teaching the mystery of the Holy Incarnation, the church has depicted God in the bodily form of a man. Rather than use cherubim to teach us the reality of the presence of the invisible God, we use the bodily image of Jesus to teach us the reality of the presence of God in our midst in the Holy Incarnation.

As with the tabernacle in the days of the Old Testament, the church building in the days of the New Testament is seen as a copy of the heavenly reality. God is present in our midst for our benefit. We have an earthly altar in our midst pointing toward the altar that is in the midst of God in heaven. Thus, Jesus is the High Priest at the altar in heaven while at the same time present among us on earth.

In this earthly copy of the heavenly reality, the very present Lord invites us to come to Him. The author of the epistle to the Hebrews states, ***“We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat.”*** (Hebrews 13:10, ESV) The resurrected Christ is present among us in and with His word, He invites us saying, ***“Come unto Me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.”*** These words of Jesus are found painted on the stained glass window. Like a sign pointing you in the right direction, these words direct people to the living Christ who is present to give to us the gift of spiritual rest. When we gather for the Divine Service, we gather in the name of Jesus in order to hear the voice of Jesus. Jesus promises us, ***“For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”*** (Matthew 18:20, ESV) In the transfiguration of Jesus the Father declares from heaven, ***“This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!”*** (Luke 9:35, ESV) As His redeemed people, we continue to come to Him and return into His presence.

Now we know that gathering in front of a window that depicts the resurrected Christ is not actually coming to Jesus in order to receive the gift of rest. However, the open hands of Jesus on the window direct us to the very place in which He gives this gift. Placed on the wall in the center of the chancel area, the image of Jesus our High Priest points us to the means of grace through which He bestows life. The LORD has instituted three means of grace:

- 1.) The Holy Gospel (written and spoken)
- 2.) Holy Baptism
- 3.) Holy Communion.

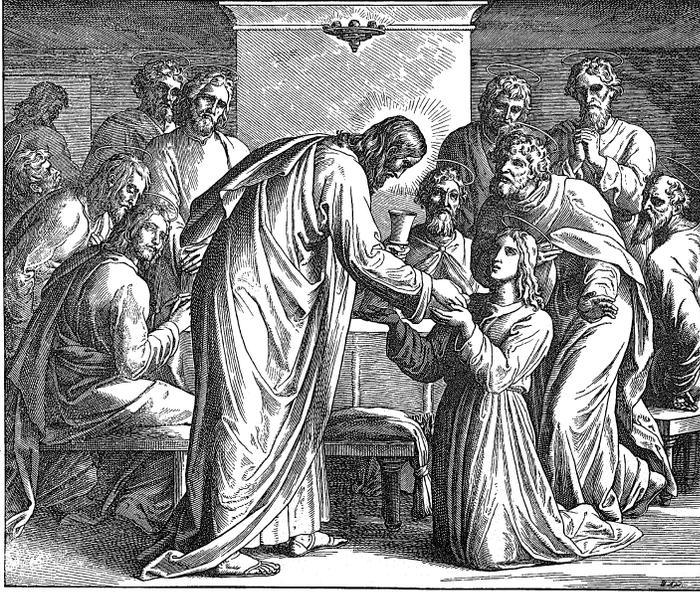
In our sanctuary, these three means of grace are symbolized by the three pieces of sacred furniture. The pulpit symbolizes the Holy Gospel. The baptismal font symbolizes Holy Baptism. The altar symbolizes Holy Communion.



*Here stands the font before our eyes,
Telling how God has received us.
The altar recalls Christ's sacrifice
And what His Supper here gives us.
Here sound the Scriptures that proclaim
Christ yesterday, today, the same,
And evermore, our Redeemer .*

("Built on the Rock" *Lutheran Service Book* # 645. Text: Nikolai Fredrik Severin Grundtvig, 1783-1872. Tr. Carl Döving, 1867-1937)

The altar is the central piece of furniture located in the sanctuary. As the author of Hebrews declares, ***"We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat... .Therefore let us go to him,"*** (Hebrews 13:10, 13 ESV). We come to Jesus at the place in which He promises to be found for the purpose of giving us rest. We have been given the New Testament. The Apostle Paul writes about the institution of this New Testament. Paul instructs us with these words,



For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new [testament] covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. (1 Corinthians 11:23-26, ESV)

Again we have the connection between the crucifixion and the resurrection. As we eat and drink we proclaim the Lord's death.

The crucifix above the altar reminds us of this reality. Likewise, it is the Risen Lord who is truly present among us in the communion of His body and blood given to us for the forgiveness of our sins. As we eat from the altar, we live by faith in the New Testament. The images on the wall above the altar merely point us to this reality.

Next to the altar, we have placed the baptismal font which shows forth the other sacrament instituted by our Redeemer. In the last chapter of Matthew, Christ our Lord says,

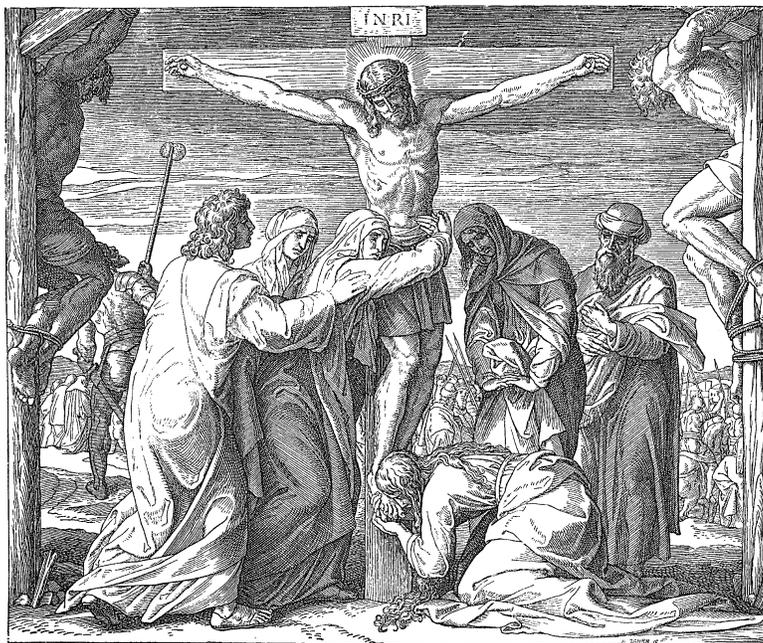
All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age. (Matthew 28:18-20, ESV)

These are the words of the Risen Lord who promises to be present with His people until the end of time as the church baptizes and teaches. He directs us to make disciples who will continue to listen to Him. In our baptism, the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit is given to us. Thus, the bowl, in which the water is placed, has three points to represent the persons of the Blessed Holy Trinity.

As we gather in Christ's presence, the baptismal font reminds us of the promise given to us in our own baptism. For this reason, after the opening hymn, the pastor speaks the words spoken at our own baptism saying, "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." Paul instructs us regarding our identity in Christ in the following way, "*Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.*" (Romans 6:3-4, ESV) And he goes on to say,

We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him." (Romans 6:6-9, ESV)

In our baptism, we were united to the death and resurrection of Christ our Redeemer. Again, theologically and architecturally it is well fitting to place the font near the images of the Crucified and Risen Lord. We are called to live out this identity that we have in Christ. We are called to take up our cross and follow Jesus. We die to sin and live to God. Thus, it is appropriate to make the sign of the cross when we remember our own baptism. Along with St. Paul we confess, ***"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."*** (Galatians 2:20, ESV)



On the other side of the altar, we have placed the pulpit. Like the baptismal font and the altar, the pulpit is also linked to the image of the crucified Christ which is at the center of the word that is preached. The Apostle Paul writes, ***"...it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God."*** (1 Corinthians 1:21-24, ESV) And again he states, ***"For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified."*** (1 Corinthians 2:2, ESV)

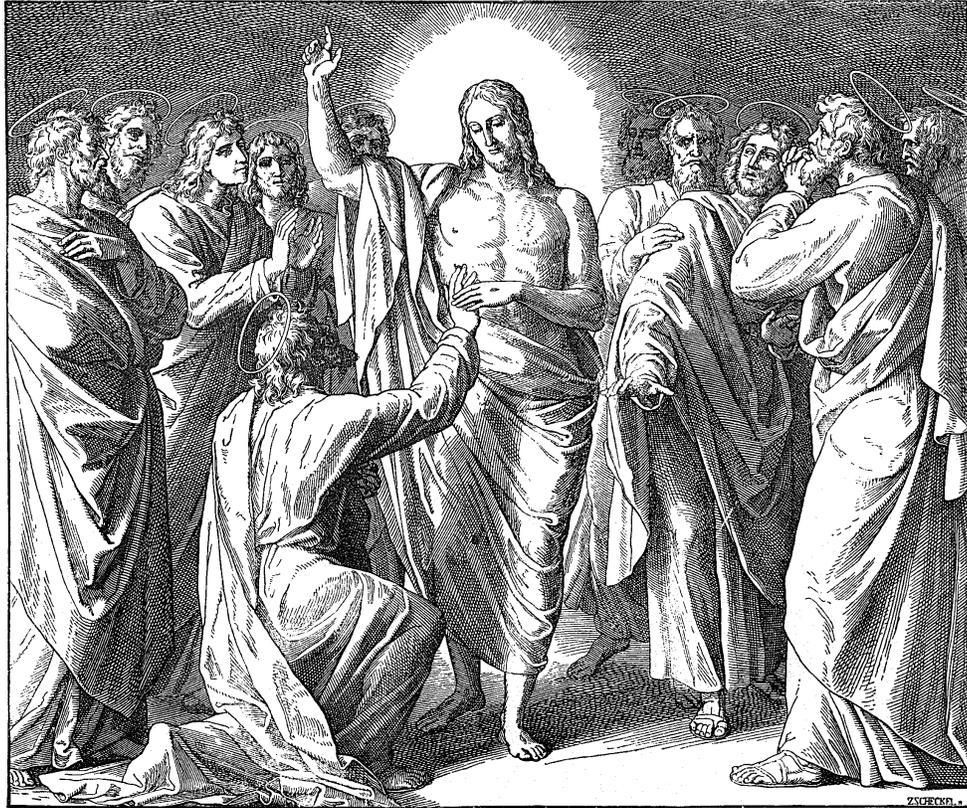
In addition, the pulpit is tied to the image of the resurrected Christ. In the same letter to the church in Corinth, St. Paul goes on to say,

Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures... ..And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. (1 Corinthians 15:1-4, 14, ESV)

From the pulpit, the gospel is preached. Christ has been crucified for you and Christ has been raised for you. The pulpit draws to mind the wooden boats from which Jesus once preached to His disciples. The man who is placed in the preaching office is given the duty of preaching the word of Christ. Jesus says, ***"The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me."*** (Luke 10:16, ESV) The pastor (shepherd) is given the duty of speaking the living voice of the Good Shepherd. The Apostle, Paul exhorts Timothy, as one who also holds this office, saying,

Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your

progress. Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers." (1 Timothy 4:13-16, ESV)



The Bible teaches us that the Resurrected Christ is actively involved and present in the life of the church. The pastor becomes the mouth piece of God. For this reason, the pastor says, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." "I forgive you all of your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." "Take and eat. This is My body. Take and drink. This is the New Testament in My blood." It is truly the living voice of Christ that speaks through the mouth of the pastor. The image of the Risen Christ in the stained glass window is a reminder both to the pastor and to the congregation of this truth. He stands in front of the image to speak the living voice of the Good Shepherd to the flock. The Living Christ is active in the gospel that is proclaimed.

The task of the preacher when preaching is to rightly divide the commands of God from the promises of God. The law exposes sin and brings God's condemnation. The gospel forgives sin and brings God's salvation. The gospel must take primacy. ***"In overflowing anger for a moment I hid my face from you, but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you," says the Lord, your Redeemer.***" (Isaiah 54:8, ESV) The task of the pastor is to declare to you that your sins have been counted against Jesus resulting in His death while His righteousness has been counted as if it were your own resulting in your life. This declared righteousness is received through faith alone.

The pastor speaks the words of the Risen Savior saying, "Peace be with you." The Holy Spirit speaks through David declaring, ***"Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit."*** (Psalm 32:1-2, ESV) And again the Holy Spirit speaks through the apostle John declaring, ***"Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates."*** (Revelation 22:14, ESV)

The desire of our Redeemer is that many more people would be counted as blessed and given the invitation to eat from the tree of life. ***“... [God our Savior] desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”*** (1 Timothy 2:4, ESV) As the redeemed people of God, His desire is our desire. ***“We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.”*** (1 John 2:1-2, ESV) This message cannot be kept hidden from the rest of the world.

Jesus says, ***“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”*** (John 8:12, ESV) And again Jesus says to us, ***“You are the light of the world.”*** (Matthew 5:14, ESV) As the sunlight shines through the stained glass window for those who gather in the sanctuary, the lights from the sanctuary shine through the stained glass window in the darkness of night. As the priesthood of the baptized, we can’t help but proclaim what the LORD has done calling us out of darkness into His marvelous light.

Our message is simple: We proclaim that ***Jesus Christ alone*** is our Redeemer from sin, death, and the devil. Therefore, an individual is redeemed ***by God’s grace alone*** and receives this redemption ***through faith alone*** in Christ. This message is rooted in the ***Holy Bible alone***.

