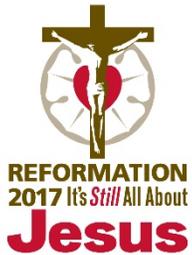


God's Ark: The Holy Christian Church and Her Ministry

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As What is the Church? Where is it? If you asked these questions to most people, they would say, “Well, over there is the Methodist church. Down that street is the Lutheran church.” Another way of thinking about “church” is to identify it with human institutions. After all, we call our synod the “The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.”

Certainly, though, there’s much more than each of these. We wouldn’t say that we have lost the Church if our building is destroyed in a disaster. Nor would we say that only Lutherans are members of the Church, or that the only work of the Church is done in synodical conventions.

No, the Church is best understood as “the congregation of saints and true believers” (AC 8). The Church is the body of Christ, those whom “Christ renews, sanctifies, and governs” (Ap 7.5). We believers are the Church, and we are united with all other believers in this body of Christ.

As we are in the body of Christ, He also sanctifies us in Baptism and guides us in our lives to the eternal life that he has prepared. Luther says, “Thank God, today a seven-year-old child knows what the Church is, namely, the holy believers and lambs to hear the voice of their Shepherd” (SA 12.2). What a beautiful picture, drawn from Jesus’s own language reflecting Psalm 23!

Just as Jesus himself guides us, He also sends undershepherds, pastors, to deliver his gifts of Word and Sacrament to the flock that has been entrusted to them.

Where is the Church? It is where the flock of God hears His words. It is where people are made holy by Baptism and Absolution and the Lord’s Supper. It where “the Gospel is purely taught and the Sacraments are correctly administered” (AC 7). The Church gathers where Jesus says He will be. It is in this Church, God’s ark, where we are brought through the floodwaters of sin to life eternal.

So how do you know that you are a member of Christ’s Church? Well, you come to a church building and sit with a congregation that is a member of the LCMS. Even better, you hear the Gospel, rejoice in your Baptism, and receive the Lord’s Supper. Now that is something to take comfort in!

Further Reading AC 7, 8, 14, 15, 28; Ap 7, 14, 28; SA 3.12; Tr

Abbreviations

AC = Unaltered Augsburg Confession
Ap = Apology of the Augsburg Confession
SC = Small Catechism
LC = Large Catechism
SA = Smalcald Articles (exclusive of the Tractate)
Tr = Tractate on the Power and Primacy of the Pope
Ep = The Formula of Concord, Epitome
SD = The Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration
Cat = Catalogue of Testimonies

NOTE: Articles and sections/paragraphs in the *Book of Concord* are denoted in Arabic numerals, separated by a period. Please note that the first number in citations of SC and LC points to the Chief Part; any numbers following the period point to the specific section/paragraph. Thus SC 1.8 does not point to the 8th Commandment, but to the explanation of the 4th.