

Nicholas Hopman
Pastor, Peace Lutheran Church
Nevis, Minnesota

Augsburg Confession Article 5: On the Ministry

That we may obtain this faith (the justifying faith in Christ described in Article 4), the Ministry of Teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted. For through the Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Spirit is given, who works faith; where and when it pleases God, in those who hear the Gospel, namely, that God, not for our own merits, but for Christ's sake, justifies those who believe and that they are received into grace for Christ's sake. They [our Evangelical-Lutheran churches of the Augsburg Confession] condemn the Anabaptists and others who think that the Holy Spirit comes to men without the external Word, through their own preparations and works.

God's did not stop working to save us after Jesus died on the cross or after he rose from the dead. Instead Christ died on the cross under the weight of the sin of the world so that he could get his hands on all our sin. He conquered sin and rose from the dead so that he could speak his final word to us. In the Gospel of John (chapter 20) after his resurrection Jesus came to his disciples. They were hiding in fear and they had denied and abandoned Jesus in his hour of need. What did Jesus say to them? He spoke forgiveness to them, saying, "Peace be with you." Then he created the ministry of the New Testament by announcing to them that he wanted this forgiveness to go out to the whole world. He said to his disciples,

"As the Father has sent me, so I send you."²² When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit.²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

In the Gospel of Matthew (chapter 28) Christ sends his forgiveness and promise of resurrection into the world by saying to his disciples,

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.¹⁹ 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."

All Christians are called to preach the Gospel. Martin Luther famously said that every father and mother are the bishop and bishopress of the household. Parents (often mothers are better at this than fathers) have much more opportunity to teach their children Christ's forgiveness than the pastor does. However, Christ wants the Gospel to be a public word contending with the powers and principalities of the world. Christ taught in many different venues including boats, on hills or mountains, and in homes. However, it was his custom to go to the synagogue on the Sabbath, read from the scriptures, and preach his good news (Matthew 4:23, Luke 4:16). Ministers of word and sacrament preach the Gospel publicly in the church and look for opportunities to teach and preach elsewhere.

As the A.C. says (article 7), the true church is not private self-selected group of the

seemingly most holy members of the church, for example, a bible-study, prayer group, or retreat that thinks it is engaging in something more holy than what happens on Sunday morning. Instead the church is the public assembly where the Gospel is properly preached and the sacraments rightly administered. Right administration of the word and sacraments means giving Christ away, not to those most holy according to the law (see Romans 3), but to sinners. Christ said (Matthew 9:13), “Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have come to call not the righteous but **sinners**.”

The world is filled with sinners so the Gospel is a public word. The church does not keep secrets from the world but gives Christ away publicly. The earliest heretics in the church were called Gnostics from the Greek word for knowledge, “*gnosis*.” The Gnostics claimed to have secret knowledge about Christ and met in secret to share the knowledge only with the properly initiated. The Apostles Creed began as the church’s attack against Gnosticism.

The church does not teach in secret. It does not use manipulative means to inculcate the Gospel. True preaching of the Gospel does not manipulate people’s feelings or try to extract money from people. Instead the church proclaims Christ freely as the one who has not come to manipulate but instead to save us from all the devils lies and manipulations.

All congregations have the ability to call a public minister and to dismiss a public minister (for preaching false doctrine or grave misconduct, not because someone decides the pastor is “not a good fit” or something along those lines, and certainly not because a pastor takes his ordination vows to scripture and the Augsburg Confession more seriously than some church members might like), meaning the congregation has the ability to fill the office of the ministry. However, no congregation created the office. God created and commands the office. I have quoted the Latin version of the Augsburg Confession above, but the German version makes this more explicit: “*Gott hat das predigtamt eingesetzt...* God established the office of preaching.”

Through the declaration of the forgiveness of sins, whether this is done formulaically in public or private confession or preached in a twenty minute sermon, and through the sacraments that Christ himself instituted, namely Holy Baptism and the Holy Sacrament of his Body and Blood, the Holy Spirit creates faith.

This is a shocking declaration in the modern American church landscape. The A. C. tells us here that the Holy Spirit is not a feeling. Nor is the Holy Spirit floating around giving people personal revelations about God, church, whom to marry, or what to eat for breakfast. Instead the Spirit gives himself to us and thereby creates faith through the preaching of Christ alone in word and sacrament.

This is especially important because the feelings that come with the Holy Spirit usually do not feel holy. When one looks in scripture one finds the Holy Spirit leading Christ into the wilderness to starve and be tempted by Satan (Mark 1:12-13, Matthew 4:1-11), and finds the Holy Spirit praying for us with “sighs too deep for words” precisely in our weakness (Romans 8:26). In the midst of suffering the cross, which Christ gives to us, the

Spirit teaches us to cling to Christ's promises alone. The Holy Spirit teaches us to trust God's word precisely against our feelings and wants and desires.

Finally, the Spirit creates faith "where and when it pleases God." If faith were up to us we would make a royal mess of it and end up filled with doubt rather than the hope and confidence of faith. Doubting Thomas tried this out for a while and proved it. Thankfully, the A. C. here reminds us that faith is the Holy Spirit's responsibility. We confess this in the Small Catechism (explanation of the Apostles Creed, "I believe in the Holy Spirit"),

I believe that I cannot by my own strength or effort come to Jesus Christ my Lord or believe in him. But the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, and sanctified and kept me in true faith.

Faith itself is delighted that the Holy Spirit is its Lord and in charge of it. It is good news that faith is ultimately in God's hands. This means that our sin, which is always finally unbelief, is not almighty and omnipotent. Instead Christ's forgiveness given in his Gospel word is almighty and unstoppable for faith alone. Faith is not our merit. Instead faith trusts in Christ's merits, with the Father and the Holy Spirit.