

A Lutheran Understanding of Faith

In the words of Bishop Aitken

1. **Faith is a Gift.** A gift of God's grace. It's not an achievement, and we don't pull ourselves up by our spiritual bootstraps. It's like "footie pajamas"; God *gives* us the *faith clothes* as a gift, and we get to grow into it!



2. **Faith is a journey.** Journeys have twists and turns, even wrong turns from time to time! Wherever we are on the journey, we are welcomed by God. (See Scripture stories like the woman at the well in the Gospel of John, or Joshua, Abraham, Sarah, Zacchaeus, Peter, Thomas, Simon the zealot, Mary Magdalene, etc..) All of these folks had their ups and downs, their good days and bad, their strengths and their weaknesses. All were invited to the faith journey-and never dropped for any reason.

3. **God is not keeping a Report Card on us.** This is true, even though we are to try to follow Jesus' way of life with our whole being. Lutherans know that each day is a new day of grace. Unlike "grades" God's relationship to us is not a matter of score-keeping. It's about simply trusting God; stepping boldly into faith and letting it propel us out into the real world. Grace trumps "grades."

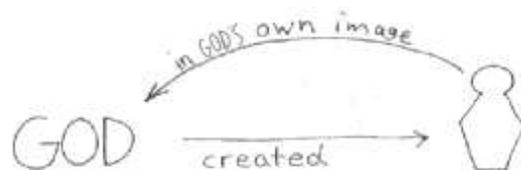


4. **God's love knows no limits.** Jesus returned to the disciples after his resurrection, not to chastise or condemn them, but once again to empower them. From the cross, Jesus would rather die than condemn the ones who nailed him, or anyone else, including us.

5. **Salvation is about wholeness.** It involves our body, mind, and spirit and is about a transformation of our heart which is the center of our being.

6. **Christianity is not "Believe now so I can go to Heaven later"**, but rather it is the abundant life God has in store for each of us right here, right now, in this life. And, of course, it extends into the life to come.

7. **Though we sin, we are still made in the image of God.** We have capacity for both destruction and goodness. Luther called this "saint and sinner" all wrapped into one, all at the same time, all the time, until the day we are face to face with our Lord.



8. **God dares to trust us to share in God's work.** (See Ephesians 2:10)

9. **God is not embarrassed by our bodies.** Jesus walked this earth like we do. We are not to try to escape life, but to embrace and steward it. God is reconciling and mending together God's creation, not destroying it. See the book of Ephesians, especially Ephesians 1:9-10



10. **God Comes to us in the most ordinary ways:** A Palestinian carpenter's son, and in bread, water, wine and word. (Luther also added that God works through the "communion of saints"; the fellowship and conversation of the sisters and brothers in Christ.)

11. **God will use you: Not only use your strengths, but also your weaknesses.** We are trained in this culture to believe only “winners” count and winning means those who dominate over others to rise to the top. The theology of the cross says God will work in ANY SITUATION, even in the most horrid, sad, and suffering places of our lives.
12. **The Lord Jesus, the Son of God** trumps all other “lords” no matter how compelling or appealing they may be. **These Lesser “lords” today include:**
- Any Government, King, or President
 - Self-Reliance rather than trust
 - Seeing faith as a transaction simply to “go to heaven”
 - A set of doctrines
 - An “infallible” leader or book of any kind
 - My Country, My family, my ideologies, My Rights
 - Faith that focuses only on the vertical dimension (me and God)
 - The Military
 - The false god of Materialism
 - A theology that focuses only on “God up there” and not “God down here”

