*The LCA provides this sermon edited for lay-reading, with thanks to the original author.*

**Commemoration of the Augsburg Confession**

**Isaiah 55:6-11**

*Lord, sanctify us by your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.*

These days, we have so many machines, gadgets and gizmos to make our life easier. For example, we can now fit TV’s, radios, maps, diaries and the Internet onto our phones that are so small they fit in our pockets.

In fact, we have so many ‘labour-saving’ devices we might be tempted to think that, if we put our minds to it, there is nothing we can’t do!

But despite our cleverness, we can feel threatened and helpless in a drought.

Sure, we can be ‘water smart’ and we can even harvest small amounts of water from existing sources, but we are still very reliant on that precious water which comes from the sky. And it’s during those times when water is limited and we have to account for every drop, we again realize its importance and how vital water is for our lives.

Quite simply, without water, there is no future for plants, animals, or even humans. Water is essential for life to exist and flourish.

In times of drought, we look forward to seeing what good rains will do to the landscape. We look forward to seeing the rain bring life, colour and vitality to a lifeless landscape; to seeing the rain awaken seeds from their hibernation.

We all look forward to seeing the rain coming without charge, given freely by God to bring life. There is nothing like that wonderful rain from the sky, and no other water or liquid brings such beneficial results, no matter how hard we try or how clever we are.

God’s Word is much the same.

God’s Word comes freely and abundantly. It brings life, comfort and hope where death, fear and despair threatens to reign. God’s Word does what it promises to do, and although the blessings are not always obvious, those looking for its results can see them. Unfortunately, many think they don’t need God’s Word.

Many consider other things more important than God’s Word. Some don’t think God’s Word is very interesting, or meaningful for their life. After all, if you were to compare God’s Word to water, there are many other better tasting drinks than ordinary water. It’s the same with God’s Word.

For example, where some people want coke or beer or wine or coffee because it tastes better than water, it’s no surprise that people prefer sport, recreation, sleeping in, and other activities instead of coming to church to hear God’s Word.

Even some of those who were brought up in the church, who have benefited from God’s Word in their lives, might now think they don’t need it. It’s almost as if they think they have had enough water to last the rest of their lives. And we are saddened by their absence, not just because we miss seeing them, but also because we fear for them. Why do people purposely put themselves into situations of drought? Why do they put their lives and their salvation at risk?

Just like rain from the sky that is vital to bring life, God’s Word is vital for us.

God’s Word gives clear direction in our lives, it gives us purpose, and it gives comfort and peace. It tells us who we are before God and reveals our foolishness. It tells of our need for salvation. It tells of God’s plan for salvation. But that’s not all. All of God’s Word points to Jesus Christ.

You see, it’s through Jesus that you get to know who God is. Through Jesus you see God’s love and mercy and compassion. Through Jesus, you see God’s plan of salvation coming to completion. Through Jesus, you see God’s promises completed. Through Jesus, you receive forgiveness, life and salvation.

You don’t get this anywhere else. You opinions, your choices, your diets, your drinks, your health programs, or even your good works don’t help you one bit. They don’t point you to Jesus, but rather they often draw you away from him. This is then, is a sense, also the task of the Church – to point to Jesus and to offer his precious gifts of life, forgiveness and salvation.

For this reason, on the 25th June 1530, a number of regional princes stood up before their emperor in Augsburg, Germany and made a stand. It wasn’t a stand for equal rights, for more taxes, for more land, for more power, or anything else like that. They stood up and confessed what they believed God’s Word clearly proclaimed. They wanted to point to Jesus because the church of the time was not pointing to him.

As they stood in Augsburg, they confessed that:

1. God is three persons in one divine essence.
2. All human beings are born with the inborn sickness of sin and do not naturally trust God.
3. Jesus Christ is the Son of God who took on human nature to die so that all human beings might be reconciled to God the Father.
4. No human being can be justified by God by their own powers, but only by faith in Jesus Christ.
5. To obtain this saving faith, God ordained the ministry of preaching and administering the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper so that people will trust Jesus.
6. This faith also yields the fruit of good works, but a person should not trust these fruit for their salvation.
7. There is only one true Church and the external signs of this Church is where the teaching of the Gospel is kept pure and the sacraments are administered rightly, even if man-made traditions or ceremonies differ from place to place.
8. The Church is not a building, but an assembly of people.
9. Since the grace of God is offered through baptism, it is necessary for salvation and therefore children should also be baptised.
10. The body and blood of Christ are truly present in the Lord’s Supper.
11. Private confession and absolution of sin should be offered, although it is not necessary to list every single sin.
12. Even if one falls into sin after baptism, they can be forgiven through their repentance and the church should forgive their sins. Repentance is understood to mean contrition or terrors of conscience as well as faith that God will forgive sins on account of Christ.
13. The sacraments are not only recognised signs for Christians, but also testimonies of God’s will toward us.
14. No one should teach or preach publicly without a proper call.
15. All Church traditions can be kept if they serve peace and good order, but people should never be burdened to keep them as if their salvation depends on them.
16. Christians are permitted to serve in courts, as politicians, as judges, as soldiers, to marry and so forth because all lawful vocations are given by God to do good works as the fruit of faith.
17. Christ will return on the Last Day to judge and to raise all the dead. Those who trust in Jesus will receive eternal life and joy, but the ungodly will be condemned to endless torment.
18. All humans have a free will in regard to making every day decisions and living honourable lives, but without the gift and action of the Holy Spirit no one will be pleasing to God, no matter how good they humanly might appear to be.
19. Even though God created and preserves all things, the blame for sin rests solely with the devil and with us. Our turning away from God causes sin.
20. To make it quite clear about good works, no one can be reconciled to God or merit grace or forgiveness through their own works or satisfactions because it is only faith in Jesus Christ that saves, but at the same time, good works should and must be done. The good works do not merit salvation and should not be relied on for God’s favour or forgiveness. Rather, they are the result of the Holy Spirit’s work to produce faith and move the heart to do good works.
21. Saints may be remembered in order that we may imitate their faith and good works, but we should never call on the saints or plead for help from them because Christ is our only mediator, high priest, intercessor and atoning sacrifice.

They also made a number of other statements concerning receiving both the body and blood in the Lord’s Supper, the marriage of priests, the Mass, Confession, the distinction of foods, Monastic vows, and the power of Bishops.

Just as water is vital for life, these princes stood up and said what they believed God’s Word clearly said and how vital it was for people’s souls.

Fifty years later, a much larger group of people signed a document called the Formula of Concord. This document reconciled and explained in more detail some things where there was disagreement among Lutherans. Again it pointed clearly to Jesus Christ and his Word.

As a member of this congregation, you also agree that the Bible is God’s true Word which offers life, truth, forgiveness and hope. You agree God’s Word points you to Jesus so that his Spirit may work saving faith in you and move you to do good works. You also agree the Book of Concord, which includes the Augsburg Confession and the Formula of Concord, is a true exposition of God’s Word.

Why do you agree with this?

You agree because God’s Word nourishes and renews your soul like life-giving water. It washes you clean and softens even the hardest heart. You agree because God’s Word does what it says; it brings you life, peace and hope. You agree because it has led you to saving faith in Jesus and to want others to receive the same.

Drink deeply from the spring of Life, which is Jesus Christ. Drink deeply from his Word and his precious gifts of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

May you never have to live in drought, especially not an eternal one!

*The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.*