

This year, the First Communion class asked about the symbols in the stained glass windows, and Vasu specifically asked about the two tall, thin windows in the back stairwells.

Last year on Reformation Day, when I preached about the symbols in the windows, Opal Katsma pointed out that I did not mention those two, but I thought that was just a new way of voicing her long standing frustration that my sermons are too short.

Maybe I was wrong about that.

In any case, this is a good Sunday to talk about those two windows.

On the north stairwell is an odd looking, circular image that was designed as a new family crest by Martin Luther.

In the center of the seal, and in the center of his theology, is the cross, a reminder in Luther's words that *faith in the Crucified saves us*.

This symbol of death means life for the heart, which is colored red and set within a white rose, again in Luther's words, *to show that faith causes joy, consolation and peace*.

All of this is set against a sky blue background, because our lives are secure in the hope of heaven, *and around this...is a golden ring*, Luther explains, *to signify that such bliss in heaven is endless, and more precious than all joys and treasures, since gold is the best and most treasured metal*.

Christ our dear Lord, He will give us grace unto eternal life.

It is God's grace in Christ that is at the heart and center of our faith, and our hope.

It is the seal and signature of our Lutheran Christian identity, and now as much as ever the weary world around us, and the weary world within us, needs to hear and know and cling to this stunning and steadfast promise.

No matter how hard we try, no matter how many tests or interviews we ace, no matter how many music lessons and soccer practices we schedule for the children, no matter how many dollars or ulcers we earn with our hard work and tireless industry, no matter how airtight we keep our resume or our schedule or our budget or the elaborately constructed veneer of happiness and having it together we Photoshop into our Christmas letters and Facebook posts, still Paul and Luther and Death and real life tell us we need help.

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, the glory for which we were created, the glory for which our souls hunger in the night and leave us wondering what it is we are missing, what it is we are looking for and cannot find in the store or on-line or in the partner who fell off the pedestal or in the grasp of our formidable willpower to feel whole.

There is something more that eludes our clutches and we know it, if not with our mind than with our gut, *the heart* as it is translated in Jeremiah, that deep and ancient tablet that only God can reach and write upon.

It is there that God traces a new covenant, as Luther understood, in the two lines of the cross, where Christ's body and blood were given and shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sins and the freedom of a new life and a fresh start.

This is not something we can muster or manage for ourselves--it has to be and it is a gift from beyond our broken selves, from Somewhere Else, from the gracious and generous and gentle hand of God.

We cannot buy it, sell it, bottle it, or save it--it has to save us, and thank God, it does.

This belief, this faith, this sacred trust, leads us to that second window.
It holds the picture of an anchor, which congers up the image of the church as a boat, or an ark,
a watercraft in a choppy world that needs the mooring of its relationship with the
Crucified Christ lest it sink in the swirling madness.

We sing the witness of this window in the text of Edward Mote's beloved hymn:
*When darkness veils his lovely face I rest on his unchanging grace;
in every dark and stormy gale my anchor holds within the veil...
His oath, his covenant, his blood sustain me in the raging flood;
when all supports are washed away, he then is all my hope and stay. (ELW #596/7)*

All of our eggs are in one basket; all of our hope is in Christ.
That is why faith is so hard, because our absolutely certain salvation is in fact a veiled
anchor, a hidden hope.

God's heart is clearest to us, Luther tells us, not in strength and power and glory but in the
unbearable weakness of the cross.

Our anchor is Christ Crucified, a bloody mess of love splattered ugly across the pages of history.
Our hope is hidden in tragedy, in, with, and under broken bread and wine poured out like
an innocent man's blood and shared by a sinful and suffering community.

The glory of God looks anything but glorious; our saving Christ hides in punctured human skin,
in the prisoner and the hungry beggar and the hospital patient, in the dirty streets and also
in the disappointing community called church.

At the center of our heart is solid scar tissue, the cross of Christ, healing and holding us together,
the haunting shape of a bizarre and beautiful new covenant by which God identifies and
saves us and holds us within the blazing circle of eternal love and life.

This is the Christ, captured and crucified by human arrogance and power, that gives us life and
sets us free indeed.

In Christ we are free to fail, free to fall, free to screw up, free to serve, free to change and grow
and try and try again, free to die and free to live.

We need not fear failure, sin, suffering, death, or any of the foaming, roaring chaos that batters
our boat, because *our anchor holds within the veil.*

We need not fear change, or as we have historically called it, Reformation, because some change
is God's Holy Spirit moving us to a new and better place, and other change is just pennies
compared to the *golden ring...more precious than all joys and treasures*, Christ's
unchanging grace on which we rest.

And so, in fickle weather with a faulty compass, the church, God's little dinghy, the ark of the
new covenant, dares to sail on...not because we chose to lift anchor, but because our
anchor has lifted us.