

What it Means to be a Lutheran Part IV
November 13, 2024
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Opening Prayer

10 second introductions

Foundations of Living as a Lutheran

Values are what we hold in high regard (what is important to us)-ideas

Ethics is the principle of right conduct (how we behave)-actions

Values and ethics determine how we treat one another and the decisions we make in our lives.

1. *How do we develop our values and ethics? Where do they come from?*
2. *When do we use our values and ethics?*
3. *What are some Lutheran Values?*
4. *How do we live out those values in our ethics?*

For Lutheran, it's all about GRACE

Justification by grace through faith

-Justification: To be made right with God, saved, sins are forgotten.

-Grace: undeserved love and forgiveness given by God. We rebel against God, but God does not abandon us.

-Faith: Believing in God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

-Grace is not earned, it is given by God. We cannot earn our salvation!

-What meaning does the grace of God have for you in your life?

-How does the knowledge of the grace effect the way you treat others?

Ephesians 2:8-10

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—⁹ not the result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰ For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

Love God, Love Neighbor

-What role do good works play in Lutheran theology if we are saved by faith?

-Good works are the fruit of and not the payment for our justification by grace through faith

-How does God show love for us?

-How do we show our love for God?

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” (John 14:15)

What are God's commands to us?

Matthew 22:36-40,

³⁶“Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” ³⁷He said to him, ““You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ ³⁸This is the greatest and first commandment. ³⁹And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ ⁴⁰On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

John 13:34-35

³⁴I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. ³⁵By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

I John 4:7-12

⁷Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. ⁸Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. ⁹God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. ¹⁰In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. ¹¹Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. ¹²No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

Love God and love one another: We love one another because we love God, we love God because God first loved us and saved us and sent his son to die for us, and God forgives us when we don't deserve to be forgiven.

All theology is this simple: LOVE GOD and LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR

But what does it mean to love your neighbor? (this is the question)

Lutheran Ethics-Lutheran Living (then and now)

Who is your neighbor? You can't expect me to love everyone!

What about the people I hate? What about the people who look different? What about the people who vote different? What about the people who are just mean? What about the people who hurt me or my loved ones?

²⁵Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. ²⁶“Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” ²⁷He said to him, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?” ²⁸He answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” ²⁹And he said to him, “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.” ³⁰But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” ³¹Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and

went away, leaving him half dead. ³¹ Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. ³² So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. ³⁴ He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. ³⁵ The next day he took out two denarii, ^[k] gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' ³⁶ Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" ³⁷ He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

Go and do likewise—show mercy—love your neighbor!!

BTW—Does the Bible say we have to *like* everyone?

What is the difference between like and love?

What does it mean to love your neighbor in the following situations or social issues?

- | | | |
|---------------------|------------------|---------------|
| -Hunger | -Homelessness | -Addiction |
| -Welfare | -Social Security | -Medicare |
| -Childcare | -Abortion | -Gay marriage |
| -Transgender rights | -Immigration | -Islamophobia |
| -Racism | -Sexism | |

What it means to love your neighbor is not always black or white.
Lutherans have a very large “**gray**” area.

Biblical Interpretation:

ELCA Lutherans do NOT read the Bible literally.

In churches with a literal biblical interpretation there is no “gray” area. They tell their people what to think about social issues. The people do not have to think or apply their faith. Issues are cut and dried.

We believe in something called “historical critical analysis”

-Historical critical analysis is a method of studying the Bible that seeks to understand the texts in their original historical and cultural contexts, and to identify the authors, sources, and influences that shaped them.

We read the Bible together and God speaks to us through the Bible

-Each of us brings our own life experience to our reading of the Bible and God speaks to us through that experience.

-What God says might be different for you than your neighbor, but there is not right or wrong as long as the interpretation is not totally off or not in line with the nature of God.

This method of biblical interpretation and the many ways God speaks through the Bible opens up a big “gray” area for ELCA Lutherans.

Look at these passages:

Timothy 2:8-15

⁸ I desire, then, that in every place the men should pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or argument, ⁹ also that the women should dress themselves in moderate clothing with reverence and self-control, not with their hair braided or with gold, pearls, or expensive clothes, ¹⁰ but with good works, as is proper for women who profess reverence for God. ¹¹ Let a woman^[a] learn in silence with full submission. ¹² I do not permit a woman^[b] to teach or to have authority over a man;^[c] she is to keep silent. ¹³ For Adam was formed first, then Eve, ¹⁴ and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. ¹⁵ Yet she will be saved through childbearing, provided they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control.

Leviticus 20

¹⁰ “If a man commits adultery with the wife of^[a] his neighbor, both the adulterer and the adulteress shall be put to death... ¹³ If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death; their bloodguilt is upon them... ¹⁸ If a man lies with a woman during her period and uncovers her nakedness, he has laid bare her flow, and she has laid bare her flow of blood; both of them shall be cut off from their people.”

Matthew 5:31-33

³¹ “It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ ³² But I say to you that anyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, causes her to commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

Because of the varying ways we can answer the question of what it means to love our neighbor, and because of our method of biblical interpretation and the way God speaks differently through the Bible, the ELCA is a BIG TENT!

- There are many different opinions on social issues, there are conservatives and progressives, Republicans and Democrats... And they are all correct!
- Just because you believe something is wrong, you cannot force your belief on someone else who doesn't see it that way. But we can have discussions like a family.
- The only “side” we are on is the side of love for God and our neighbors!

What does it mean to love your neighbor? That is what it means to live as a Lutheran.

Living as an ELCA Lutheran Today

Publicly Engaged Church (from the ELCA website ELCA.org)

We are a publicly engaged church that rolls up our sleeves and gets to work. We do God's work in the world, the work of restoring and reconciling communities. We pursue justice and seek peace no matter how long the journey or wide the chasm. Because we are grounded in God's love and forgiveness, we are well equipped to live and serve here and now, in the world, with all its complexities, tensions and ambiguities.

There is no aspect of life in which God is not active, no place where God is not present. And this

is exactly where we are called to participate in God's work, in the thick of life, embracing individuals, families and communities that are hungry for hope and healing, justice and peace, advocates and partners.

Our faith and our call to boldly serve and love our neighbor take us into some interesting and challenging aspects of life: advocacy, corporate social responsibility, racial justice, science and ethics, peacemaking, justice for women, social issues, and community organizing. We are drawn into every corner of life, society and its institutions to bring the good news of Jesus Christ and to work for lasting, positive change that upholds human dignity. You have a place in the ELCA and an important role in God's work in the world — find ways here to get connected to a community of faith and the work of our publicly engaged church.

Do you agree with this statement that the ELCA is a publicly engaged church?

What theology of Martin Luther do you see reflected in the above statement?

Does Abiding Savior reflect the church described in this statement? Why or why not?

Where does living like a Christian take place? At church? At home? At work? At school? At the grocery store?...It takes place "in the thick of life!"

Social Statements of the ELCA: (available on the ELCA website at <https://www.elca.org/Resources/Faith-and-Society#SocialStatements>)

Abortion
Church in Society
Criminal Justice
Death Penalty
Economic Life
Education
Environment
Genetics
Health
Human Sexuality
Peace
Race, Ethnicity and Culture
Sexism

There are also 17 Social Messages also available at <https://www.elca.org/Resources/Faith-and-Society#SocialMessages>

These Social Statements and Social Messages are NOT the "official" stance of the ELCA. That would be going against the "Big Tent" idea.

What do you think about the ELCA taking "positions" on social issues today? Is it helpful or does it hurt? Does it bring people to the church or drive a wedge into congregations?

Lutherans Making a Difference Today:

Because of Lutherans strong traditions of love and service to neighbors, Lutherans are well established in providing care and reaching those in need. Not only as local congregations, but through Lutheran institutions such as Lutheran Social Services and other organizations that are a part of the Lutheran Social Services in American Network.

From their website: <https://lutheranservices.org/our-story/>

The Lutheran Services in America network reaches one in 50 people in America each year. With more than \$26 billion in combined annual services, the Lutheran Services in America network advances equitable outcomes for children, youth and families, improves independence and choice for older adults, champions meaningful services and support for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, and strengthens stability and purpose for veterans, refugees, new Americans and more.

Lutheran Services in America network organizations are rooted in the Lutheran theology of caring for our neighbor and the spirit of early Lutheran reformers who transformed the way we address society's greatest challenges.

According to Luther, the purpose of every vocation is to love and serve our neighbors, as God does not need our good works, but our neighbor does. We are called to serve our neighbors in all aspects of our lives, whether in our work, relationships, or communities.

Overall, the Lutheran legacy of loving neighbor emphasizes the importance of putting our faith into action by serving and loving those around us, and of seeing all people as our neighbors and worthy of our love and care.

What Lutheran theology do you see in the statement above?

What are your thoughts about living as an ELCA Lutheran today?

Conclusions:

What new insights are you taking away from this course?

What questions do you still have about being a Lutheran?

What makes you most proud of your heritage, theology and practice as a Lutheran?

Close with the Lord's Prayer