



# A Theological Core: Communicating a Bold Lutheran Message

*Developed by the Theology Working Group of the Claimed Committee*

What does it mean to be Lutheran today? How do we share a clear, concise, compelling message of the Lutheran identity?

The Claimed Committee spent time this year thinking about just how to share that message with the world. We've created three short statements reflecting different approaches to the Lutheran message that value a diversity of Lutheran voices. The goal is to communicate the "core" of the Lutheran message with clarity and boldness.

Our work is the distillation of many conversations, readings from classic and contemporary Lutheran theologians, and the discussions at the 2013 Synod Assembly that invited people to offer "Lutheran mantras" and "Lutheran elevator speeches."

What do you think of the statements? Do they characterize your faith? How might you use these statements to communicate the Lutheran message to the world?

## Lutheran Theological Themes

**Freedom:** Faith gives us the freedom to live in the world in all of its messiness. God's acts have freed us from works to prove our worth and goodness to God and thus freed us for works of love and justice for our neighbors.

**Justification:** God doesn't need our religious acts, but the world needs our human acts.

**Theology of the Cross:** In Christ God is revealed to be most present in those places that seem most Godforsaken

**Paradox and Tension:** The world is not going to all fit together nicely; all our questions will not be answered, our doubts will not turn to certitude through the lens of faith. Faith helps us see God present when the world doesn't make sense and gives us courage to live with and through our questions and doubts.

**Incarnation and Embodiment:** We don't work our way up to God. Through Christ God meets us in material, embodied, fleshly, elemental ways like in bread, wine, water, and spoken word.

**Saint and sinner:** We're all on the same page. We can all be Christ to each other one moment and in the next (or sometimes in the same moment) deny Christ and our neighbor.

**Vocation:** We don't separate ourselves from the world to become holy. God gives us all gifts to share with the world. These may not be seen as "special" or "holy" gifts. The gifts we are given call us into the mundane tasks of everyday life. This is also where God meets us: in the word we eat, the word we drink, and the caring and compassionate words and acts we share with one another.

**Community:** Faith, spirituality, religion, etc. is never a matter of "just me" and God. God meets us in the midst of community.



**Metropolitan New York Synod**  
**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**  
God's work. Our hands.

## One-Liners that Seek to Sum Up the Lutheran Witness

- Imagine your worst nightmare: God has already been there and will get you through it
- When you're ready to give up, God is just getting started with you
- We have the freedom in the Gospel to see things as they really are and, in love, to tell it like it is
- Realists and idealists at the same time
- We're not ashamed of our blemishes, because we're confident in God's love
- You name it, nothing can separate you from God's love
- God does it. We don't have to. We can't anyway
- We are free to do the right thing, no strings attached
- Success or failure, on top of your game or falling flat on your face, God loves you beyond your wildest dreams
- You long to belong? We do community well. And we serve comfort food
- Looking for fulfillment in the workplace? We believe that God calls everyone to meaningful work in life
- News that can change lives and turn the world upside down
- In Christ, freed for love
- Fed that we may feed
- The Bible: an open book, not a weapon
- Worship that you can see and hear, touch, taste and smell
- We offer a bath in God's cleansing waters and bread for life's journey (along with a little wine to gladden your hearts)
- Evangelical **and** Catholic? Yes, in the best sense of each word
- Open doors, open hands, open hearts and open minds
- Quietly doing good just to say thank you to God
- Lutherans do it with thanksgiving
- Tired of all the name calling? We make room for real conversation
- Confident in God without being know-it-alls
- In the world for good
- We're spiritual **and** religious
- We know we're not the only church in town, and we're fine with that
- With God, trust not certainty
- By God's grace, putting the fun back in dysfunctional
- Have trouble believing in God? God believes in you!
- Talking the talk. Struggling to walk the walk. Then God picks us up
- Embraced by grace
- Living by faith, not fear
- Despite what's going on in the world, by God's grace, we're not scared to death
- Courage to confront the powers that be

### A Story that Speaks a Lutheran Message



Inside my heart, there is a broken pot. It has always been broken—broken since the moment God knit me together in my mother's womb. It does not mean that I must be ashamed, only that I am always in need of healing.

There are times when I forget that I am broken; when I think that I need no one else, and can do everything on my own. But I usually find that, when I forget that I am broken, I end up standing alone.

At church we tell stories and sing songs about the broken pots in our hearts. We call on God and one another, and find that, gathered together in love, where God comes and meets us, we feel more whole.

In this life, my pot will never be mended. Instead, the cracks are where the light shines in. God's work takes place in and through my brokenness, and in God's movement in and through me, I am bound together.

Everyone's pot is broken. Yours and mine and Mother Theresa's. You may feel that your pot is shattered, scattered across the floor and you will never feel whole again. The good news is that God is shattered and scattered with you. That's who Christ is: the pot that was shattered and scattered across the world and across time so that we would never be alone, gathering our shattered pieces to be made whole so we can be vessels filled with God's love to be poured out into the world.

The story we tell in church is funny, because it's backwards and upside down. It tells us that, it's through the brokenness that we find liberation. That in all those pieces of ourselves, shattered and scattered, God finds us and frees us from all that binds us. It doesn't mean that life will get any easier. But it does mean that we're free, and that we're never alone.