

# Misericordias Domini

John 10:11-16

April 18, 2021

A few years ago in St. Louis, the headquarters for our church body held a contest for naming the cafeteria. One of the nice ladies who works there suggested they call it "The Diet of Worms." They didn't go with it. Why? Because Lutherans have no sense of humor. So now it's called "Mission Grille." I call it missed opportunity.

But in case you don't get the joke, Worms is a city in Germany. A *Diet* was a meeting. So the Diet of Worms was a meeting in the city of Worms. And one of the most significant events in Christian history happened there at the Diet of Worms on this day exactly 500 years ago.

The year before, in 1520, Pope Leo X had issued a bull (a papal edict) entitled *Exsurge Domine*. The bull called on Martin Luther, then a professor at Wittenberg University, to recant his writings or face excommunication. Now excommunication at this time was typically followed by execution.

That's in 1520. When Luther doesn't recant, Emperor Charles V summons Luther to the Diet of Worms the next spring. The last time someone had tried to reform the church, about a century earlier, they burned him at the stake. (That was Jan Hus in 1415.) It seemed the same thing was being planned for Luther. Standing for the truth has consequences. "The time will come," Jesus said, "when those who kill you will think they are serving God."

Luther gets to Worms on April 16, 1521. On the 17<sup>th</sup> he is summoned to appear before the emperor. Assembled there are all the powerful people in Empire and Church, and royal troops in their parade uniforms. On a desk is a stack of 25 of Luther's books. "Recant them all," the interrogator says.

Luther asks for more time to think and pray, and they give till the next afternoon.

I think that's a key detail. Luther isn't just plunging headlong towards martyrdom. He's not unreflective. He's capable of considering the question, "Am I wrong?" At times he's plagued by it.

So he spends the night praying, and consulting with friends and counselors. The next day, he's ready. He certainly expects that what happened to Hus will happen to him. This is the end. But he is called to confess.

The next day, at 4pm on April 18, Luther says that the stack of books are of three kinds. Some were books that no one had ever questioned; he wouldn't recant those. Others were books that attacked the abuses of the Roman church. If he recanted those, he said, "I would be doing nothing but strengthening tyranny." There was a third category of books which he called attacks on individuals. He apologized for his harsh tone. And then comes the famous bit of the speech:

**Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason (for I do not trust either in the pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. [Here I stand, I can do no other.] May God help me. Amen.**

Afterward the emperor issues an edict which condemned Luther, but Prince Frederick, known as Frederick the Wise, had his soldiers fake a kidnapping, and Luther goes into hiding in the Wartburg Castle. News of Luther's heroic stand spreads far and wide. The phrase, "Here I stand," is the most famous bit. (One of our members has a facemask that says, "Here I stand. You stand over there.") "Here I stand" becomes part of the mythology around Luther, that he's a champion for individual rights and the freedom of conscience.

But Luther's stance is not about freedom of conscience. He says, "My conscience is captive to the Word of God." "I am bound by the Scriptures."

We're not Lutherans because of Luther. We're labeled that because it's our stand too. Five centuries later we are still called to this confession: "I am bound by the Scriptures," "My conscience is captive to the Word of God."

Today we have to get ready to confess. Christians are now a minority in America. We are about to find out if we really believe the Creed we just said. Jesus warned in today's Gospel that the wolf is coming. **"The wolf catches the sheep and scatters them."**

When they laugh at you in high school or college for being a Christian, how will you respond?

When they come to cancel you, what will you confess?

When being a Christian starts to cost you advancement, promotion, even threatens your very livelihood, what will you confess?

The wolf is coming.

When he does, this is your stand: The words of Jesus, **"I AM the Good Shepherd."**

I AM - this is the Name given to Moses. All other gods are frauds. YHWH, the One who Is, He is your God. He kept His promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He brought Israel through the midst of the sea on dry ground. He rescued the three young men from the fiery furnace.

This is why He became incarnate. God became man to face the wolf with you and for you. He is the noble shepherd, who gives His life for the sheep.

Whatever your struggle, whatever your challenges, whatever your sins, you have a God who is with you through the valley of the shadow of

death. The cross of Jesus is the rod and staff that comforts you. The Supper of Jesus is the table prepared before you.

Your Good Shepherd will never leave you nor forsake you.

Jesus the Good Shepherd forgives you.

Jesus the Good Shepherd was taunted for you, mocked for you, spit upon for you.

Jesus the Good Shepherd defanged the wolf for you.

When persecution comes for you, when doubt comes for you, when death comes for you, you say: "On Jesus I stand. I will listen to His Word. Though all the world descend into madness, the Scripture remains true, it cannot be broken. Here I stand, on Jesus I stand. I can do no other, so help me God."

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Alleluia! Christ is risen! *He is risen indeed! Alleluia!*