

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

The root of the Greek word for “tradition” is also the root for the Greek word for “hand over”, which as a participle is used for Judas Iscariot as “the betrayer”. He “handed over” our Lord. So “handing over” is not always good, although in the case of our Lord what men meant for evil God used for good, for your eternal good.

While we revere, respect and study the early Christian Fathers, some of the most profound Christological heresies were articulated early in the history of the Church. What is old, and what is “handed over” is not always salutary. Most uses of the word “tradition” in the New Testament are negative - the Lord frequently condemns “tradition”, especially that of the Jews.

That said, St. Paul wrote to the church in Thessalonica “Stand fast, and hold the traditions which you were taught.” The Apostle is referring not to the traditions of the Jews, rather to the Apostolic Tradition, the Tradition that gives us the New Testament, the Tradition from which the Three Chief Symbols, the Creeds, are derived, the Tradition rightly articulated in the Book of Concord.

That is good tradition, salutary tradition, for it is normed by the Word of God. In that Tradition you are to stand fast, to that Tradition you are to hold. According to the Fourth Commandment, we have fathers in the faith. And we honor those fathers by keeping the faith, the Biblical, Confessional faith, that we received from them – the Apostolic Tradition.

Changing the church to accommodate the fallen world, waffling back and forth on liturgy and rite, counting the holy liturgy as unimportant, changing the doctrine and teachings of the True Church to please every new generation of hearer: these things dishonor our fathers in the faith. So St. Paul wrote the church in Thessalonica, commanding them to “Stand fast, and hold the traditions which you were taught.”

Everywhere in Scripture we are taught that doctrine is important. Holding fast, unswervingly, to the Biblical truth is the duty of, and the greatest blessing to, the Church founded upon the Prophets, the Apostles, and the Evangelists. No one puts a piece from a new garment on an old one, otherwise the new makes a tear. No one puts new wine in old wineskins, or else the wineskin burst and the wine be spilled.

Introducing new doctrines and teachings, new liturgies and rites, bursts the wineskin – it fractures the church and creates schism. It damages faith, and leads astray. And inasmuch as each of us has flesh, inasmuch as each of us is sinful, we too have desired to remake the faith to our own personal liking. We sinfully desire to emphasize the doctrines that please us, and to ignore the Scriptures that reveal our favorite sins.

Hear then the Word of St. Paul: “Stand fast, and hold the traditions which you were taught...” Therein lies Truth and salvation. Scripture alone teaches us of Christ. Scripture alone brings salvation. The central article of the Christian faith is justification by God’s grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Without this Truth there is no salvation. It is the central theme of every Book of Holy Scripture. There is no other Truth. It is

the only Tradition that saves, the Tradition upon which the Holy Church stands and falls.

Thanks be to God, in mercy he does not abandon us to our own sinful religions. He gives us His Word. He gives us, through our Fathers in the faith, the holy liturgy. In the holy liturgy He brings us the very salvation Christ won for us by His death and resurrection.

The forgiveness of sins, the Word preached in its purity, the Word publicly read, the Holy Eucharist – these are God’s gifts to you in the Divine Service. These are His gifts to you this day – forgiveness, faith, salvation and life. And that you rightly respond to His Saving Gifts, the Holy Liturgy gives you the very Word of God to speak back to Him.

By His Word and the words of the holy liturgy He makes the Truth known to you, that against the tides and teachings of this fallen world you may stand fast. For as our Lord teaches: “...the old is better.”

The faith of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the faith of Moses, the faith of the Holy Prophets, the faith of the Apostles and Evangelists, the faith of the Lutheran Confessors, the faith our Lutheran fathers passed on to us, the one true faith, is God’s gift to you in Christ Jesus by the power of His Spirit.

By this Apostolic Tradition, by this Divinely inspired doctrine and faith God establishes you and guards you from the evil one. By this doctrine and faith God gives you confidence in the Lord, to will and to do His will. By this doctrine and faith God directs your heart in His love, and in the patience of Christ. By this doctrine and faith God gives you everlasting

consolation and good hope by His grace, and comforts your heart until He comes again. Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ.

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