

Lutheran Theology Video Transcript

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What is theology?

Hi. My name is Jeremy Myers. I teach religion and youth and family ministry at Augsburg College in Minneapolis, MN.

Today I'm going to give you a brief introduction to some of the important pieces of Lutheran theology. I'm guessing many of you think theology only happens here – in rare, old books that were written by really smart people and are pretty hard to understand.

(scene switches to me standing behind a pulpit in a church sanctuary)

Or here, in sermons preached by pastors with years of expensive and tedious training.

It's true. Theology does happen in these places.

(scene switches to a busy intersection)

But theology also happens here.

(scene switches to a coffee shop)

and here,

(scene switches to a school cafeteria)

and here.

Theology is not only done by academics or pastors, it is done by all of God's people whenever we attempt to try to understand and articulate who God is and what God is doing in our world. Theology happens whenever God's people wonder about God, whenever we make claims about God or ask questions about God. Theology happens whenever you are speaking about God. That is what the word theology means – "God talk".

Theology matters

(scene switches to a quieter place)

And theology matters for our youth today.

- It matters because we want our young people to know what Christ has done, is doing and will do in their lives.
- It matters because we have the call and the responsibility to talk about God with our youth.
- It matters because the way we describe how God works in our world will have a huge influence on the type of God our youth believe in.
- It matters because Christ's life, death and resurrection are good news for us and we want our young people to be transformed by this good news.
- Theology matters!

Lutheran's have a particular theology that helps us explain Christ's presence and work in particular ways. I want to give you a quick introduction to this perspective by covering some of these primary concepts within Lutheran theology.

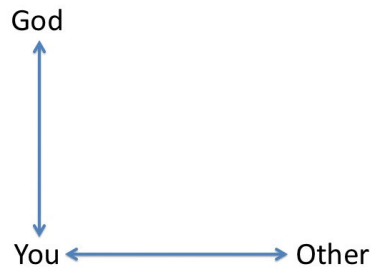
(The following words will appear on the screen as they are mentioned)

Justification
Two Kingdoms
Simultaneously Sinner and Saint
Law and Gospel
Means of Grace
Vocation

Relationships and Sin

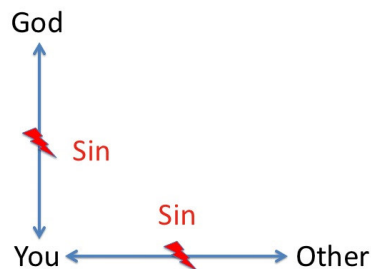
And here is where we start - We were created in the image of God. This image is a relational image - The Trinity. So, at the center of God you will find a relationship. We were created in this relational image. We were created for relationship – to love God and to love the other, and by other I mean other people and the rest of creation. You express your love for God through faith, and you express your love for the other through good works.

(The image below will appear as the previous sentence is read.)



Sin distorts these relationships making it difficult for us have faith or to love. Sin is our unwillingness to love God or the other - both other people and the rest of God's creation. This is an unwillingness that we all struggle with daily.

(The image below will appear as the previous sentence is read.)



Justification

So, this is the problem that must be dealt with and the whole of Lutheran theology hangs on its solution – **justification**.

Justification is the claim that it is Christ who restores these relationships. Christ is the one who brings us back into a relationship with God. There is nothing we can do to mend these relationships. It is God, in Christ, who does the mending for us. (Pause and reemphasize) This is good news because we all know how screwed up we are and how impossible it is to be perfect enough to deserve God's love. Justification is good news!

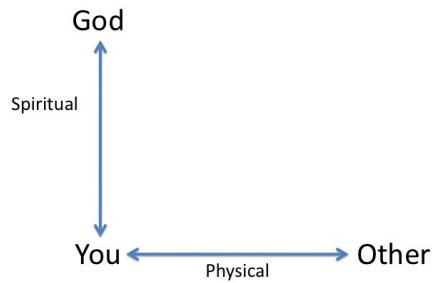
Okay. So if God fixes all of this for us, then there is nothing else we need to worry about, right? So what now? If Justification is a free gift and there is nothing we can do to earn it, then does it even matter how we live our lives? Does it matter if I swear a lot? Does it matter if I never go to church? Does it matter if I recycle or give to the poor? Does it matter if I work for justice?

These are HUGE questions that our youth are asking and the way we answer them matters. This is why I love Lutheran theology – because it handles these things in a paradoxical or dialectic way that I think is pretty honest about the human condition.

Two Kingdoms

See, you and I are always living life in tension between two simultaneous realities, or what Luther referred to as **“Two Kingdoms”** – the spiritual and the physical . . .

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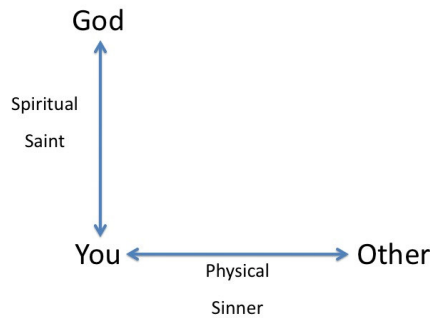


We experience life relationally. We are constantly in a relationship with God and with the other. These relationships, between you and God and you and the other, are different types of relationships and cause us to think about our lives simultaneously as both a physical reality and a spiritual reality. But these realities are experienced simultaneously. It is dangerous to think that our spiritualness can help us escape our physicalness or vice versa. We can help our youth by helping them think about life theologically, as something that is simultaneously spiritual and physical and that God cares about both of these dimensions (or kingdoms) of our lives.

Sinner and Saint

We experience live in these two kingdoms as both sinner and saint – at the same time.

(The following image will appear after the previous sentence is read.)



I'm sure we don't need to think long and hard for examples of how we experience both of these on a daily basis. The truth is, we never become more saint or less sinner. We are always both as long as this physical life is lived.

Some of the youth I used to work with talked about their "Sunday Night Me" and their "Monday Morning Me". They liked their "Sunday Night Me" who was very accepting of everyone else, patient, peaceful, and full of faith in God. But they really didn't like their "Monday Morning Me" who was judgmental, impatient, anxious and had a hard time trusting in God.

Or maybe your youth return home from camp or a mission trip feeling very "holy" or "saintly" only to become irritated that the feeling doesn't last.

We can help our youth by helping them understand themselves theologically – as always both saint and sinner, as always both "Sunday Night Me" and "Monday Morning Me". The sinner doesn't disappear while you are at camp and the saint doesn't fade away after you return.

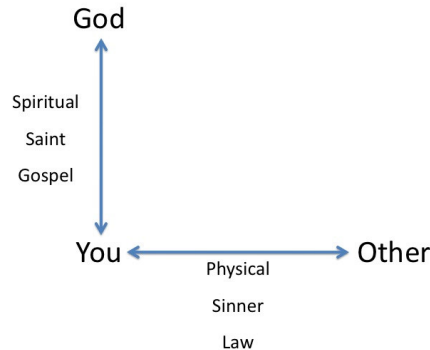
We are always living life in the spiritual and physical kingdoms as simultaneously sinner and saint. This means God must be at work in both kingdoms in order to ensure the future of our relationships.

Law and Gospel

(film this segment in a church parking lot)

God does this through the **Law and Gospel**.

(The following image will appear after the previous sentence is read.)



God's Law does two things. It tells us what we should do and points out the fact that we do not always do it.

The Law is not a bad thing. For those of you who live where it snows, this example might help. Think of the lines in a parking lot. They show us where to park and they point out how badly we miss the mark sometimes. These lines are valuable. When it snows, and those lines are covered, it is almost impossible for people to park their cars appropriately, right? This is how God's Law works. It provides us an appropriate way to live with one another. Without it, our lives become a mess – like the church parking lot after a snowfall.

The Gospel, or God's good news, doesn't tell us what we should do or what we've failed to do. Rather, it tells us clearly what God has done. Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again!

So, in this physical reality, God has desires and expectations for us. Expectations that we, as sinners, often resist. God's law reminds us of these expectations so that we will continue to work for the good of the other. But God does not expect us to do good works for the sake of our relationship with God in the spiritual reality. There the gospel reminds us that Christ has redeemed us and has made us saints by bringing us back into a relationship with God.

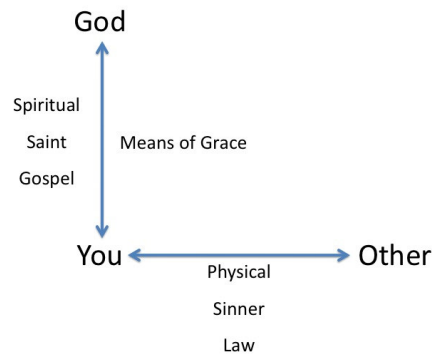
Again, the two kingdoms, the sinner and the saint, the law and the gospel are not diametrically opposed to one another. These are all ways we describe how God works in our world. They work together for God's purposes.

Means of Grace

Two more “Lutheran” terms will help us understand how this happens.

The **Means of Grace** are the ways in which God’s grace comes to us on a regular basis and mends the relationship between God and us.

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We talk about this happening in three ways: the word, the sacraments and the mutual conversation and consolation of the saints.

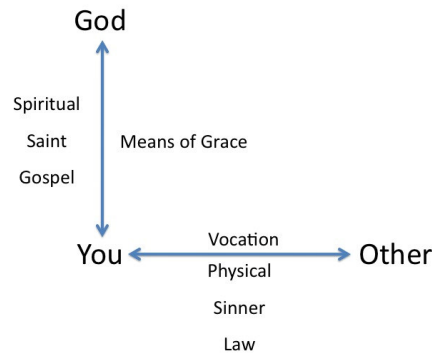
- *The Word:* God’s grace enters our lives whenever God’s word is revealed to us – in sermons, in hymns and maybe even in pop culture?
- *The Sacraments:* God’s grace enters our lives when God’s promises of forgiveness are joined with the physical stuff of this world – bread, wine, and water – for the sake of reconciliation.
- *Conversation and Consolation:* God’s grace enters our lives whenever we find ourselves truly hearing or being heard by our brothers and sisters. This might happen in church and worship, but it also happens in van rides to retreats and in coffee shops.

The Means of Grace are ways we experience Christ’s presence and activity in our lives. They are the ways in which God restores our relationship with God.

Vocation

Vocation is another way we experience the weaving together of our two realities.

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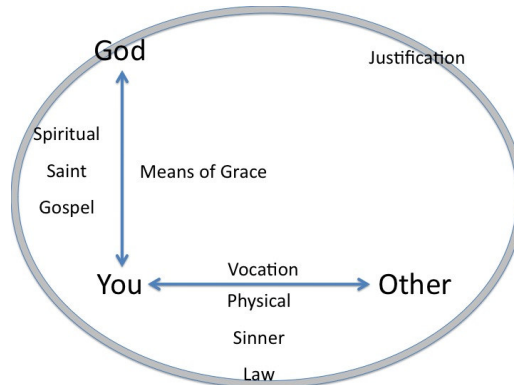


Vocation is our call from God to serve our neighbor; it mends the relationship between you and the other. In a sense, it changes our understanding of the Law so that we serve our neighbor, and creation, not due to force and guilt but out of freedom and love. God's grace comes to us through the gospel making us "saints". But we still also live as sinners in need of God's guidance and call. God calls us to serve our neighbor for our neighbor's sake – not for God's sake. If we make the mistake of serving our neighbor in order to praise God, then we've turned our neighbor into an object or tool that we use to make God happy. God does not want our good works, God wants our faith. But God also knows that our neighbor is in desperate need of our good works.

Conclusion

This diagram that we've created can be thought of as a simplified expression of justification – or how a relational God is at work in the world for the sake of restoring the relationships between you and God and you and the other.

(The following diagram will appear as the previous sentence is said.)



(Film this scene at pulpit)

You will hear these terms used when pastors preach sermons.

(Film this scene in the rare book room at Luther Seminary)

And you can read volumes about them in a theological library.

(Film this scene at a busy intersection.)

But these words are not meant to make you sound smart or to confuse your youth. They are confessions of faith that have been argued and crafted over centuries of debating about how God is present and active in our world. These ideas – justification, two kingdoms, sinner/ saint, Law and Gospel, the Means of Grace and Vocation – help us explain how Christ is at work in the lives of our youth in a particular way that we think is faithful to the Bible's witness of who Christ was, is and will be.

Now its your turn! Lets see if these things make sense to you and if they help you understand how Christ is at work in your life.

**This curriculum was developed for the Practice Discipleship Project, an initiative of the 2012 ELCA Youth Gathering (www.elca.org/gathering) in partnership with the ELCA Youth Ministry Network (www.elcaymnet.org). While primary authorship belongs to the author noted above, this is a collective work of the Practice Discipleship writing team: Dr. Terri Elton (Luther Seminary: www.luthersem.edu), Dennis "Tiger" McLuen (Youth Leadership: www.youthleadership.org), and Dr. Jeremy Myers (Augsburg College: www.augsburg.edu). Permission is given to use these resources in your local context, so long as no organization or individual profits from the use of these materials.*