



# Confessions of a Lutheran: Reformation **REMIX**

Virginia Synod Faith Formation - Fall 2021

## Playlist 4: The Cross Alone is Our Theology

### Track 1: The Cross Alone is Our Theology Video by Dr. Vince Everer

Watch [here](#). (You can also stream directly from the website.)

Study Question:

- How do you see God at work under contraries in your faith life and in the world around you? How do we practice seeing God under contraries?

Foundational Reading:

- Luther, “The First Commandment,” in The Large Catechism (pp. 386-89 in the [Kolb/Wengert](#) edition).
- Luther, “The Heidelberg Disputation,” esp. Theses and Explanations 19-21 and 28, pp. 98-100, 104-5, in [Annotated Luther 1](#).

For deeper study, you may wish to read:

- Walter Altmann, “The God of Life Against All Falsehood of the Idols of Death,” in [Luther and Liberation](#), 27-46.
- Rudolph R. Featherstone, “The Theology of the Cross: The Perspective of an African in America,” in [Theology and the Black Experience: The Lutheran Heritage as Interpreted by African and African American Theologians](#), edited by Albert Pero and Ambrose Moyo (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988), 42-55.
- Deanna A. Thompson, “Becoming a Feminist Theologian of the Cross,” in [Cross Examinations: Readings on the Meaning of the Cross Today](#), edited by Marit Trelstadt (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2006).

## **Track 2: Galatians 6.14 NRSV**

May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

## **Track 3: Reflection by Janet Gomez (Apostles, Gloucester)**

First off, I have to say that I just love Dr. Evener's title of his talks – "Lutheran Theology 101, The Gift of Lutheran Theology", because I truly believe it is an incredible gift that needs to be shared whenever and wherever we can. Since taking the first Ambassadors Community for Theological Study (ACTS) classes, I have come to absolutely love and embrace the tenets of our Lutheran theology. Those classes were such an eye-opener for me – a cradle Lutheran. I love to tell the story of how I came to become part of that very first ACTS community – my husband Gene and I were attending a Power In The Spirit event in the summer of 2002 – we were coming into Colket Center at Roanoke College and there was Pastor Jean Bozeman sitting there and, to this day, I can still see her and hear her saying to us that we should consider attending ACTS. Well, 2002 was also the year that our only son left for college so Gene and I accepted Jean's invitation and started ACTS – our lives have NEVER been the same. Gene and I, in over 30 years of marriage, had never talked about our faith the way we did after attending those first classes.

Of the 4 tenets being offered in Confessions of a Lutheran: Reformation Remix, The Cross Alone Is Our Theology is the one I live with the most today and find myself talking about often with folks. At first I really struggled with trying to understand what this meant – especially in a time when I was surrounded by what is labeled the theology of glory. And, as so many times happens when I am struggling with something, the Holy Spirit comes to me in some way to help me understand – and that was an article in the formerly titled magazine, Lutheran Woman Today – this is what the author of that article said:

“To Luther, faithfulness is the outworking of faith. Far from removing us from the ambiguities and complexities of life, faithfulness propels the baptized into them. As Luther said, one becomes a theologian of the cross

not by speculating about life, but by living and dying in engagement with the gritty realities of the world. It is precisely in this engagement that the promise, the presence, and the power of the resurrection become most clear. The faithful go where Jesus went before them, seeing those among whom they serve as beloved of God and worthy of hope. On their journeys, the faithful confront and challenge systems and institutions that hurt the many for the sake of the few, as Jesus did before them. Faithfulness under the cross is an adventure, not a sure and certain plan. Through his own spiritual struggles and scriptural studies, Luther came to reject the theology of glory (a theology that focuses on me and what I must do to be saved – a terrible sinner who must humble myself and accept Jesus as my personal Savior and submit my life totally to my powerful God’s control and be vigilant in belief and action and through all of this, I must accept that everything that happens in my life is part of God’s good plan for me) and turned instead to what he termed the theology of the cross – rather than beginning with me and what I must do, the theology of the cross begins with God: God’s faithfulness to all creation and God’s humbling of all human initiative before the cross. I do not accept Jesus as my personal Savior. Rather, in faith, I risk trusting that through Jesus’ death and resurrection, God has already accepted me. In baptism God sealed me by the Holy Spirit and marked me with the cross of Christ forever. I did nothing and can do nothing to merit God’s faithfulness to me. It is all a gift, free and underserved. Returning daily to the promises of my baptism, I am free to confess that I have sinned against God through what I have done or left undone and to hear again the proclamation of God’s unmerited forgiveness for me. Beloved of God, simultaneously saint and sinner, I am called to serve in the messy places of life, accompanied not by a plan to make sense of it all but by the Presence of the Living One who has already gone there before me.”

I just have to share one more reflection from Dr. Timothy Wengert, from “A Formula for Parish Practice,” one of my ACTS professors:

She seemed young and helpless, this separated mother of four. I had first met her when she and her husband approached me about baptizing their second child. Despite an invitation to join the congregation, they declined and soon moved to another community. But now, years later, she was

back with an agonizing story of abuse, abandonment, debt, an eating disorder, and despair. She had the requisite professionals to help her: physician, social worker, counselor, and lawyer. What she wanted to know from me came at the end of her tale of woe: “Pastor, does God still love me?” What can anyone say to someone who in her own hopeless life is living out Psalm 22, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Whatever else one may say, there is finally only the remarkable paradox that the God to whom we pray has also prayed that psalm and suffered with us in the flesh. In Christ there is no level at which God does not know and bear our infirmities. In fact, deeply hidden in, with and under her calamities and ours is the crucified God.

The cross alone is our theology.

## Track 4: Art



Do you / does your group have a favorite cross image? Share that together!

This is Pastor Kelly's (from the Madisi congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malawi)

These wooden crosses are used in closing worship each week of summer camp at Camp Lutherlyn in Prospect, PA. Each candle represents a camper, each cross is a cabin/family, and the light is the light of Christ.

Shared by Pastor Colleen Montgomery



## Track 5: Music

- ["In the Cross of Christ I Glory"](#) ELW No. 324 Text: John Bowring, 1792–1872 / Music: Ithamar Conkey, 1815–1867
- ["Beautiful Things"](#) Gungor (2010)

## Track 6: Poetry

"God In Suffering"

Praise to the God in suffering;  
Praise to the God of the five wounds,  
to the God of compassion,  
the God who suffers-with:

God enters through our wounds  
where we can no longer keep God out  
And God heals.

God comes to us when our cups are empty,  
when there is at last room for God.  
And God fills.

God appears to us when our disconnected  
behavior enslaves us.  
And God leads each of us  
stumbling and grumbling and groping people  
through the waters,  
across the wilderness,  
over the mountains,  
to Canaan.

To freedom.

"God in Suffering" - by Susan Palo Cherwien (Palo Cherwien, Susan. "God in Suffering." Crossings: Meditations for Worship. ECS Publishing Group, 2003.)

## Track 6: Continued Reading

- From [A Formula for Parish Practice: Using the Formula of Concord in Congregations](#) (Wengert, Timothy J. A Formula for Parish Practice: Using the Formula of Concord in Congregations. Fortress Press, 2017)
  - “Article Eight: God Suffers in the Flesh for Us” (page 137)
  - She seemed young and helpless, this separated mother of four. I had first met her when she and her husband approached me about baptizing their second child. Despite an invitation to join the congregation, they declined and soon moved to another community. But now, years later, she was back with an agonizing story of abuse, abandonment, debt, an eating disorder, and despair. She had the requisite professionals to help her: physician, social worker, counselor and lawyer. What she wanted to know from me came at the end of her tale of woe: “Pastor, does God still love me?” What can anyone say to someone who in her own hopeless life is living out Psalm 22, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Whatever else one may say, there is finally only the remarkable paradox that the God to whom we pray has also prayed that psalm and suffered with us in the flesh. In Christ there is no level at which God does not know and bear our infirmities. In fact, deeply hidden in, with and under her calamities and ours is the crucified God.