

The Both/And of Lutheran Identity

From Bishop Gonia's Installation Sermon for Pastor Ann Hultquist
(Augustana Lutheran Church, Denver CO – 24 April 2016)

For me, what is classically Lutheran is our calling to be a both/and church in this either/or world.

To be a both/and church, to bear witness to the gospel in a way that is always including and never dividing, this one of the unique marks and gifts the Holy Spirit has given to us as a church of the Reformation, and in particular as this part of the Body of Christ we call the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

In case you're not sure what I mean by the gift of being a both/and church, let me point out that our Lutheran theology and our ELCA way of living as church are filled with both/ands. It begins with our definition of church as being a community gathered around Word and Sacrament – not one or the other but both/and. We speak of the Scriptures as Christ's living word proclaimed to us in both Law and Gospel. We acknowledge that in this life we live simultaneously as both sinner and saint. We recognize that God is at work both through what Luther called the Kingdom of the left and the Kingdom of the right, what we might call the secular and the sacred. Through the gospel, we say, we are made perfectly free lords of all, subject to none, and at the same time we are made perfectly dutiful servants of all, subject to all. We find God's truth revealed to us in both faith and science, not either/or. And so it goes ... dig just a bit into our ELCA way of being Christ's church and you will find plenty of both/and – sometimes know as paradox.

From Bishop Gonia's 2013 Missional Gather Presentation: Gifted to Grow

Paradox: of all churches, we are the church that most embraces paradox

- Paradox is a theology of both/and instead of either/or – we are a theology that proclaims:
 - Law and Gospel
 - We are simultaneously sinner and saint

- God works through the Kingdom of the left and the Kingdom of the right
- We are perfectly free lord of all, subject to none, and perfectly dutiful servants of all, subject to all
- We find truth in both faith and science
- At our best, we are non-dualist in an dualist world – all true spirituality is non-dualist
- Not everyone can handle paradox – some need black/white as well as either/or – those who are open realize that paradox speaks a deep truth
- As a church, we have the gift of paradox!