

**SERMON for the OPENING SERVICE of the 48TH ANNUAL CONVENTION
of the
Concordia Lutheran Conference
Friday, June 25, 1999**

Delivered by the Rev. Paul R. Bloedel, President

Text: **Ephesians 4:14-15**

Beloved friends in Christ and especially all pastoral and lay delegates to the 48th Convention of our Concordia Lutheran Conference, guests and visitors,

When the satanic spirit of liberalism entered the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, that once great synod began to forsake the only norm and standard of faith and life which had been upheld steadfastly by Walther, Pieper and others up till about the year 1922. A resentful spirit began slowly to enter the Synod apparently beginning with the professors in the prep schools and in St. Louis Seminary, through the synodical officials to the rank and file among the pastors and stimulated by influential liberal laymen who were evidently moved by popularity and outward growth and prominence and who were without solid Scriptural convictions. This spirit finally erupted publicly with a document called “*A Statement*,” drawn up, signed and circulated by forty-four prominent Missouri Synod professors, pastors, and theologians in the year 1945.

These Statementarians, as they were called, whose numbers increased steadily into the hundreds, deplored the lack of love exercised by those who opposed the sin of unionism and encouraged the joining together in religious work and worship with heterodox Lutherans in spite of differences in doctrine and practice. There was talk, in those days, of uniting in religious work and worship at least on the basis of those doctrines on which they were agreed. The stage soon became set for the adoption of the “*Common Confession*,” a union document which compromised the Scriptural position of the Missouri Synod, as set forth in *The Brief Statement*, with the errors of the American Lutheran Church. The *Common Confession*, consequently, placed the Missouri Synod on a false confessional foundation in the name of LOVE.

False teaching then began to run rampant and was tolerated throughout the synod on the verbal inspiration of Scripture, on the days of creation, on Adam and Eve being real people, on the virgin birth of Christ, on objective justification, on the Sacrament of the Altar and on the doctrine of the Church and ministry. Boy Scoutism and the military chaplaincy were embraced; money making schemes (bake sales, bazaars, raffles, etc.) became popular throughout synod; women began to vote in the congregations and became voters at synodical conventions; pastors could be called into and discharged from their offices by majority vote; even the modern worldly dance, which had been consistently denounced as sinful throughout synod, became socially acceptable; and many congregations began to hold dances in their church buildings for various social events and at weddings. And all this was tolerated in the name of love, while pastors who insisted on remaining faithful to the pure teachings of God’s Word in doctrine and practice and urged the synod to return to a God-pleasing in accordance with God’s Word, were expelled from their congregations in the most loveless, unscrupulous and unscriptural fashion.

One of the Scripture texts which the liberals in the Missouri Synod used as their watchword, at that time, and in which they found refuge was the text on which the motto for our convention this year is based, namely, “*Speaking the Truth in love*.” They felt that the former attitude of the Missouri Synod toward false doctrine and a strict adherence to Scripture was *loveless* and *legalistic*. This, of course, met with hearty approval on the part of the majority of lay people

throughout the Synod, who had not been thoroughly instructed in the Word of God, who were happy to be able to join in religious work and worship with relatives and friends in heterodox Lutheran congregations, and who felt that now they were more in step with the times. They were led completely to misunderstand the Word of God in our text.

Let us therefore consider as the theme for our meditation in this opening service of our 1999 Convention these words of St. Paul to the Christians at Ephesus:

“Speaking the Truth in Love”

Let us consider:

- I. The truths which should be spoken, taught, and confessed, both in doctrine and practice, and
- II. How love should be the moving element when the truths of God’s Word are spoken and correctly applied.

Now, may God the Holy Ghost bless the consideration of His Word.

I.

In the verses which precede the words of our text, the Apostle Paul speaks of the work of the ascended Christ in the growth of His Church on earth: How He is not far away from His Church but fills all things with His divine presence and majesty by which He rules the whole world for the benefit of the true believers; how He gives to them apostles, and prophets, and evangelists, and pastors and teachers that they might be perfected in their faith, that they might faithfully be served with the Word, that they might be built up as the Body of Christ in unity and faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ spiritually mature, knowing the teachings of Scripture well and being able to apply the Word of God to their thoughts, words, and actions that from this day forward they are no longer children tossed about by every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive. Then come the words of our theme, *“But speaking the Truth in love,”* and the text continues, *“we may grow up into Him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ!”*

It is obvious from the context that the truth referred to in our text, which we should speak, is not merely human truths (for example, the truths in mathematics or true science) as *opposed* to fiction or to something which is obviously untrue. The truth which we should speak in love is the truth of God’s Word, as opposed to error and false teaching, as opposed to *“good words and fair speeches which deceive the hearts of the simple,”* as opposed to *“every wind of doctrine”* by which, as children, immature Christians are tossed about to their own destruction, as opposed to the *“sleight of men, and cunning craftiness”* by which unsuspecting Christians are deceived, as opposed to the *“sheep’s clothing”* of the false prophets who as ravenous wolves greedily devour the sheep. What faithful teaching and thorough instruction in the Word of God is therefore called for by these words, *“Speaking the Truth in love?”*

Without question, *“Speaking the Truth in love”* must begin in your home! Your children should be told, as soon as they are able to understand words, that they had been brought to the Lord Jesus in Holy Baptism on which occasion, through faith in their Savior, they vowed what had been publicly expressed by their sponsors, namely, to serve the Triune God and Him only and to resist the devil and all his wicked works and ways. And so, to a little child, you, as a Christian father, may therefore say, “Dear little girl or dear little boy, when you were a tiny infant you

were baptized. Water was poured on your head three times, in the name of the true God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. By having you baptized, your mother and I brought you to the Lord Jesus; and you were made His dear child, a lamb in the fold of the Good Shepherd. If you had died when you were still an infant or a very young child, you would have died believing in Jesus as your Savior; and God's holy angels would have taken you to heaven. Then the goal for which the Lord had given you to us would have been reached, and you would be happy forever and ever."

As early as possible little children should be taught words and their meanings which should become a part of their Christian vocabulary: Bible, sin, Satan, death, hell, Jesus, Father, Son, Holy Ghost, heaven, Savior, prayer, angels, God's commandments and God's love. It's not difficult to explain to little children what sin is and how, because of sin, we deserve death and everlasting punishment in hell; how sin came into the world and why all people are sinners, even Mama and Daddy and Brother and Sister; how Jesus, the Son of God, became a little child to keep God's holy Law perfectly in their place and to suffer the punishment of hell on the cross for them and for all people, the punishment which they deserved by their sins, that all who believe in Him might receive the forgiveness of sins and go to heaven; and then how eager we should be to show our love for Jesus by our words and by our actions. Such words and concepts should be instilled or imparted consistently into the minds of your children by talking to them, even in your everyday conversation, *and* by your example, as they grow in wisdom and knowledge during the very formative, pre-school years of their lives. They should know to whom they pray, whom they praise, and to whom they give thanks, and WHY! Then they can be encouraged, out of love for Jesus, to renew their Baptismal Vow every day, saying, "O help me Lord this day to be Thine own dear child and follow Thee; and lead me, Savior, by Thy hand until I reach the heavenly land;" "Keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please Thee!" "Dear Savior, hear my little prayer! Make it so I don't sin so much any more!" "Help me to be good; to love my mama and daddy and my brothers and sisters more and more day by day; and to be kind to them. Help me to make Your commandments the rule for my life because You loved me so much that you suffered and died for my sins and made it possible for a sinner like me to go to heaven!"

"Speaking the Truth in love" should, in this way, begin in your home, even as the Lord says in Deuteronomy 6:6-8, *"These words, which I command Thee this day, shall be in thine heart; and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes, and thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house and on thy gates!"* O, what would our Conference be like if all of our households diligently followed this Word of God *"that we may grow up into Him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ!"* Do you think that our children, on which the future of our congregations and our Conference rests, raised in such a Christian environment, would easily be tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine and by behavior which is contrary to the Word of God? Do we not, then, as parents see the gravity of the situation; and should we not resolve that the pure truths of God's Word, where Law and Gospel are properly divided, must always be the guiding principle in our homes?

Then what about our pastors' work among us? How eagerly and how readily such Christian parents will want to hold up their pastor's hands by insisting that their children work diligently in preparing their Sunday School lessons and Confirmation Class assignments, that ample time is used productively for their memorization of the assigned Bible passages, and that the Word of God is not simply given a lick and a promise but is thoroughly committed to memory, and that they approach their work with the Word of God in prayer, saying, *"O Lord, Thy Word is before*

me. Help me to learn it well with a reverent and teachable mind that, through it, my faith may be strengthened and I may grow in my knowledge of Thee and in the application of Thy Word to what I believe and how I act to the glory of Thy holy Name, my gracious Savior and Redeemer, without whom I am lost and condemned, ruined in body and soul;” and that they are able to put into their own words how each Bible passage which they memorize is important for them, how it applies to what they believe, how they talk, and how they live out their lives in this world as dear children of God.

Such “*speaking the truth in love*” should also be evidenced in every divine service and Bible class throughout our Conference. The truths of Scripture, spoken from your pulpit, should not be mere platitudes or just quotations from the Bible or from orthodox church fathers or from the Lutheran Confessions, but should carefully be applied to the faith and life of the members in the congregation; and, because all Scripture is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction and for instruction in righteousness, “*speaking the Truth*” involves everything that is taught in the Bible, even as the Apostle Paul told the Ephesian elders, the pastors, at Miletus, “*I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God!*” Yes, truths should be spoken which plainly set forth what the Bible teaches in opposition to all the false teaching and practice throughout external Lutheranism, as well as among the Reformed, and wherever sectarianism rears its ugly head; also those truths which speak out plainly against the socially and politically acceptable sins of our day: abortion; the modern dance; pornography in literature, art, and photography; unmarried couples living together as husband and wife; sexual perversion described as an alternative life style; and drunkenness as a sickness; economic speculation and gambling; government lotteries; stealing by a show of right and the gaining wealth by all kinds of suits against others in court; gossip and sins of the tongue which can so easily destroy the unity of the spirit in a Christian congregation; avarice and over-extending one’s income by the misuse of credit cards; and so on.

Bible classes should be held not only on Sunday morning but also at other times during the week, if possible, so that any average member in the congregations of our Conference is enabled to do what our text and the theme of this convention tells us, namely, to *speak the truth in love*. The Word of God, through the pen of the Apostle Paul in our text, is not directed merely to pastors but to all true Christians everywhere. There should be a thorough knowledge and understanding of God’s Word. You can’t speak what you don’t know! You have to *know* the truth before you can speak, confess, uphold and defend it! Thus the Apostle Peter urges us in his epistles to grow in our knowledge of Scripture, not to stagnate after Confirmation and thereby lose even that which we, by God’s grace, have! As new-born babes frantically want their milk, so we should earnestly and eagerly desire the unadulterated Word of our God, that we may grow thereby. Again the Apostle Peter writes: “*Grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*” And these words are written in the context of a warning directive. The first passage, I Peter 2:2, which tells us that we should desire the Word of God as new born babes desire milk, is preceded by the words, “*Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings [things which destroy faith], as new born babes, DESIRE the sincere milk of the Word, that ye may GROW thereby!*” and in II Peter 3:17, the admonition to grow in grace and knowledge is preceded by the warning, “*Beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. But GROW in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!*” Yes, in order to speak the truth, you must grow in it. Not to grow means most often to stagnate and to retrogress, just like a child who does not grow is seriously ill and may soon die! Not to use the Word of God in our lives by speaking, confessing, teaching and upholding its precious truths is to lose it or to have it taken from us by the Lord Himself, whom, by our non-use of the Scriptures, we would be

asking to visit us with a famine of His Word. I can think of nothing more terrible in the whole world: no one to speak, teach, confess or uphold the Word of God in its full truth and purity.

II.

Now, this “truthing” is to be done in “LOVE!” Our text does not have in it the words “*speaking the truth*” as it is translated in our *King James Version*. Instead of the phrase “*speaking the truth*,” our text has only a single Greek word which cannot be translated with a single word in the English language unless we used a made-up word such as the word “truthing!” This word would then include speaking, teaching, confessing, defending, conversing in, contending for, upholding, admonishing, rebuking, and comforting with the Word of God. “**Truthing in love!**”

Whenever we speak, teach, confess, or uphold the truth of God’s Word. we are to be motivated by LOVE first of all, love for the Lord, who has been infinitely gracious to us and in all His dealings with the children of men in Christ Jesus, our Savior, and secondly (the way in which the word love is evidently used in our text, namely), our love for the souls of others which is built on our faith in and love for our Savior. This, of course, is not the kind of love which the Statementarians had in mind when they chose this text as their motto. They actually used this Word of God to defend “watering down” the truth or “compromising” it with error for the sake of *outward* peace and unity. This they called “*speaking the Truth in LOVE!*” To them it was more loving to join together in religious work and worship with those who teach false doctrine and the followers of false teachers, than to follow the Word of God which says in Romans 16:17, “*Mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them!*” Because of this wrong use of the word “love,” they also forsook following the words of the Lord Jesus in Matthew 18, so that the God-pleasing use of church discipline and excommunication, as well as synodical doctrinal discipline, fell into disuse and is seldom, if ever, found any longer in the Missouri Synod or its constituent congregations.

In our text, the Apostle Paul obviously opposes that speaking the truth of God’s Word which is merely done for the purpose of contention or strife (Philippians 1:15-16), or primarily to make a show of one’s theological acumen, understanding and knowledge. Such a pedantic misuse of the God’s Word would remove from it its power and grace and be an offense to the weak. Our pastors’ sermons, throughout our Conference, should not merely be a recitation of Scriptural truths or, as is so popular among conservative Lutherans today, an endless quoting from our orthodox fathers or from the Lutheran Confessions. Every sermon should be a vital demonstration of love for the souls of the people which God has committed to their care to feed, people who are being fed daily with the husks of man’s wisdom at work, at school, in the market place, at the doctor’s office, in conversation with worldly-minded friends and relatives, on television, over the radio, in the newspaper, and in millions of books. Every sermon should be filled with that wisdom alone which is able to save their souls, which is a mystery to man as he is by nature and to our old sinful flesh, hidden from the wise and prudent of this world but revealed unto babes, so that the preacher *feeds* the Church of God which He has purchased with His own blood (Acts 20:28)!

And, to this end, Law and Gospel must be properly divided not only in our sermons but also in our Bible Classes, in our Sunday Schools, in our instruction classes for Confirmation, in our families, in our conversations with our fellow Christians and with those who are outside our fellowship. We must tell others the truth about themselves, even as we know from Scripture the truth about ourselves: How that we are, by nature, lost and condemned, ruined in body and soul, deserving nothing but eternal condemnation in hell. Why? Because each one of us is conceived and born in sin, having no true fear, love and trust in God in our hearts as we came forth from our mother’s womb, without any righteousness or the ability to do even so much as one good thing which is pleasing to the Lord, not

being able to know or understand the things of the Spirit of God, dead in trespasses and sins, enemies of God and opposed to His Word! Yes, there is not one good thing in us by nature because of which fact even our best works are as filthy rags in God's sight (Isaiah 64:6)!

We must reveal to others God's wonderful plan of salvation for them, even as we know that precious truth for ourselves: How that God loved us and all human beings from before the foundation of the world! Why? Not because of anything good in us or about us! Why then? Because of His undeserved kindness which the Bible calls "*grace*" and which cannot be separated from Christ Jesus, our Savior! In eternity, God determined to send His only-begotten Son into this sin-cursed world, to make Him a true man like unto us in every respect, yet without sin, that, as a true man, He might be able to take our place under the Law and suffer the eternal punishment of hell which all people deserve; and that, as true God, His keeping of the Law would be sufficient for every man, woman and child ever to live here on earth, thus satisfying God's *legislative* justice, and that His suffering the torments of hell would be substitutional for all people, thus satisfying God's *punitive* justice. God commands us to keep His holy Law perfectly in thoughts, desires, words and deeds. Jesus did just that in your place, sanctifying your sinful birth by His sinless birth and sanctifying your sinful life by His sinless life, "*for as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of One shall many be made righteous*" (Romans 5:19)! God demands eternal punishment for every one who is conceived and born in sin and is not holy and perfect in His sight. This demand, too, Jesus fulfilled as your Substitute, bearing in His own sinless body the consequences of sin throughout His life here on earth and, on the accursed tree of the cross, enduring the torments of hell which you and I and all people deserve by our sins, so that He "*has redeemed us from the curse of the Law being made a curse for us!*" (Galatians 3:13). Therefore in Christ "*we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace*" (Ephesians 1:7) because "*God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them*" (II Corinthians 5:19). Yes, "*ALL [who] have sinned and come short of the glory of God*" are "*justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*" (Romans 3:24), that all who believe in Him "*should not perish but have everlasting life*" (John 3:16)!

But WHO among us can believe in Jesus as our Savior and Redeemer? Here, too, we must confess to others the Scriptural truth, so notoriously perverted by the Reformed sects, that none of us can make our own decision for Christ or believe in Him as our Savior by our own reason or strength because of our sinful conception and birth. It is the Gospel, the Good News of our salvation in Christ Jesus, our Savior, in Word and Sacraments, through which God, by His almighty power, changes the human heart, making His enemies His friends, opening spiritually blind eyes so that they may see the way to heaven, and making the spiritually dead alive! The Bible says, "*Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God which liveth and abideth for ever!*" (I Peter 1:23). The Gospel is God's power to save us, as it is written, "*I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation!*" (Romans 1:16); and, speaking of the true believers, John writes, "*Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God!*" (I John 1:13). "*So then faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God!*" (Romans 10:17).

Yes, we must be motivated by love for the souls of others when we speak these precious truths to them. We are not handling human philosophy or cunningly devised fables but the Word of God through which God works, nourishes, and sustains saving faith in the human heart and brings others into His Kingdom of Grace. Only the Word of God, the Holy Scriptures, are "*able to make [them] wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus*" (II Timothy 3:15).

But “*speaking the Truth in love*” or “*truthing in love*” must also involve itself in telling other professing Christians how good works are an absolute necessity in their lives and in the life of every true child of God, even as following the Word of God in YOUR life is so vitally important, remembering always that it is not your upright life or your good works which make you a Christian, but that you endeavor to live an upright life and do good works because the Lord has made you a Christian. As a Christian you do not do good works in order to get to heaven, but because heaven is already yours through Christ your Savior as a free gift of God’s grace! Good works, a Christian life, is the fruit of your faith in Christ Jesus, who says, “*If a man love Me, he will keep My Words*” (John 14:23); “*If ye love Me, keep My commandments!*” (John 14:15). Here is where admonition, comfort, warning, exhortation, and instruction in righteousness occupy an important part in “*speaking the Truth in love*” as Christians. Out of love for the souls of others, you should also tell them ever so plainly, “If you are really a Christian, you will earnestly want to live your life as a child of God. You should therefore live your Christianity, “*walk[ing] worthy of the vocation wherewith [you] are called*” (Ephesians 4:1), glorifying God both by your words and by your deeds in harmony with what God says in His Word.

A Christian cannot love his Savior and, at the same time, despise certain portions of God’s Word. If there are errors in doctrine and practice, you should *speaking the truth in love* by refuting those errors with the pure teachings of Scripture, knowing that any error will threaten a person’s faith; it “*will eat as doth a canker*” (II Timothy 2:17); and as yeast, it will “*leaven the whole lump*” (I Corinthians 5:6). If there are those who claim to be Christians and listen to and support false teachers, you should *speaking the truth in love* and warn them with the words of Jesus, “*Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves*” (Matthew 7:15). If a fellow Christian is given to worldliness, and his mind is beginning to be obsessed with the pleasures of this life, and he is pondering how close he can get to living as the world lives and yet not sin; if he is seriously ill; if doubts beset his heart; if troubles, the cares and the worries of life, anxieties and hardships besiege him; if he is gravitating toward unchristian friends and companions; rightly apply the pure teachings of God’s Word out of love for his soul and point out plainly what should always and only motivate him to oppose whatever threatens his faith, namely, the great love of God in Christ Jesus his Savior, to listen to and to heed carefully the warnings, exhortations, instructions and admonitions which you are able to bring to him from the Scriptures. If your “*speaking the truth [to him] in love*” meets with stubbornness and contempt, such a person may have already lost his saving faith in Christ Jesus and may be on the broad road to hell!

May our text and motto for this year’s convention sink deeply into your heart and encourage you to use the Bible passages which you have committed to memory down through the years, especially in your Confirmation instruction class, so that, rightly dividing the Word of truth, using both Law and Gospel in its proper application to what you, as a Christian, believe and how you, as a Christian, live, the Word of God may become in you, as our Savior said to the Samaritan woman, “*a well of water springing up into everlasting life*” (John 4:14), “*that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine by the sleight of men and cunning craftiness whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ.*” God grant it! Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria!