

**Kelly A. Fryer. Reclaiming the L Word: Renewing the Church
from Its Lutheran Core.
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Chapter 3. Jesus Is Lord

While **dogma** is a set of principles that are believed to be true, a **creed** is a *formal statement of those beliefs*. The creeds we use in worship (the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed) didn't come along until pretty late in the life of the Christian Church. Early Christians formulated their own first "guiding principle." This earliest creed was simply "Jesus is Lord." All biblical evidence suggests that this was one of the first formal statements of belief:

"If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Romans 10:9

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

It sounds simple to say "Jesus is Lord", but it isn't always easy to mean it. Most of the time, I want to be the boss of my own life. It is easy to get confused, putting tradition or culture or "my" ideas or whatever at the center of our life together as Christians. I wonder how many of our problems – at church as well as in our own personal lives – would be solved if we simply remembered that JESUS is Lord, no *thing* and no *one* else.

If we are really serious when we confess that "Jesus is Lord," then the first and most obvious thing this means is that, therefore, I *can't* be! Neither can you. Only *Jesus* can be Lord. And that changes everything.

NOT JUST ANY JESUS

There are a lot of ways to understand who and what Jesus is. He is a great teacher, a good example, a powerful healer, an important prophet, a wise counselor. But before Jesus is *anything* else, for those of us who are Lutherans, Jesus is the One who meets us at the cross.

Luther reminds us that, while God could have come to us in all kinds of ways, God chose to come down here to meet us in the most unlikely place of all: on the cross, in the face of an outcast and stranger, who suffered there and died. No one in their right mind would imagine that God, the maker of everything that is, seen and unseen, would come down here to us in such an odd and sad and scary way. If we really believe that Jesus is Lord – this Jesus, the one who dies on the cross for us – then we will have to be ready for anything ... and honest about everything.

READY FOR ANYTHING AND HONEST ABOUT EVERYTHING

Because Jesus is Lord, we can expect to be surprised by a God who comes to us in the most unlooked-for ways and in the most unexpected places. This is one of the reasons that Lutherans are reluctant to make definitive statements about what is unerringly “true” or unquestionably “right.” We are more comfortable with paradoxes. We believe, for example, that God’s people are both “saints” and “sinners” at the same time. We don’t mind living with a little “gray” when it comes to hard issues and tough choices.

If “Jesus is Lord” means that I can’t be, it also means that *I don’t have to be*, either. And for that, we should all be thankful. Over and over again, we try to be God. And the truth is, we make terrible gods. Jesus convicts us with the power of his love, and makes us look more honestly than we would ever dare to do or even want to do on our own. In his cross, we see our own failures ... our own faults. And we know the truth that Jesus came down to be our Savior because we needed to be saved.

DO THIS IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME

As Lutherans, we remember who we are – and who we are *not* – every time Jesus meets us in the Word and in the Sacraments. We remember, every single day, if we follow Luther’s advice, the baptism that first showered God’s love and grace upon our lives. There is nothing we need to do or could do to deserve these gifts. Because we haven’t earned them, they remind us again and again that Jesus – *only* Jesus – is Lord. “Do this in remembrance of me,” Jesus said. And we do.

WRESTLING WITH THE WORD // THINKING THINGS THROUGH

1. Read Isaiah 1: 1-4, 16-20.

The prophet Isaiah spoke to the people of Israel as they sat on the brink of political, economic, religious and cultural disaster. What were they doing wrong? If they listened, what would they do differently?

2. Read Matthew 18: 1-4.

What surprising question did the disciples ask Jesus? What challenging answer did he give to them? What is freeing about his answer?

3. What things in your life can easily become “gods” or “idols” for you, turning your heart away from the ONE God?

4. What things too often become “lord” in our congregation? What could we CHANGE around here that would make people mad, even if we did it for a good reason?

5. Name a surprising place where you heard God’s voice. What did you hear God say?

6. If our church were to confess “Jesus is Lord” and really mean it, what are some of the things we might have to give up, or take on, or do differently?