



# THE PASTOR'S VOICE

Insights from Church Leaders

## **The Pastor's Voice Podcast Season 2: Episode 11**

### **Transcript: Denominations, Creeds and Worldview**

**Reuel Sample:** Alex Zenk, thank you for joining us on the pastor's voice, how are you today?

**Alex Zenk:** I'm doing wonderful. Thank you for having me.

**Reuel Sample:** Alex is a Lutheran Minister in Iowa. Tell us about your ministry. Where do you serve?

**Alex Zenk:** I serve a small town in Iowa, about an hour north of Des Moines. The church is called Stratford Evangelical Lutheran Church. They just named it after the town one hundred and sixty some years ago when they built the church. And I serve alongside a Baptist church and we have a methodist church in town as well. So there's us three for a town of about 700 people. And right now it's just me, the Baptist Church as the Methodists or without a pastor. So we're trying to juggle all of the community events and all the things that go on that we partake in between the two of us. So it's it's increased our workload, but it's a true blessing to be a part of this wonderful area, and these people are an absolute blessing for for me and my wife and our family.

**Reuel Sample:** Well, you're in a small town in Iowa, but I'm sure that you and your church and your community are facing challenges, not just COVID, but what other challenges are you facing in Iowa or where you're serving?

**Alex Zenk:** Well, the the biggest thing I think is. There's a there's an age disconnect within the church. My my congregation who actively served there well over the age of 50, all the way up into their nineties, and so there's this, you know? There's that group and they are active in the church, but then we're missing, you know, the people under 50 and the people in my age group, the we don't have a ton of youth in the church and I think. There's a big disconnect, and I've noticed it prevalent within the Lutheran Church and and I think because there's a couple of facets that happen. One, people don't understand maybe the the design and the purpose behind of liturgical service. And so they they want to not have to be confined to that. So they flock to the bigger non-denominational churches where it's just music and some preaching or speeches or whatever, and they don't have to do anything else. So I actually just started this week on my for my church starting to teach through just short video sessions on Facebook. Kind of the facets behind why we do the things we do and talking about the Bible, talk about the liturgy, talk about early church service and all that kind of things.

**Alex Zenk:** And my goal is to have kind of a database of teachings that people can just go to and reference quickly and in hopes to maybe bridge that gap to show that, you know, this isn't just a church for for older people, it's a church that can cover all ages based upon what we construct in our liturgy. And so I think that's at least that's the biggest challenge I've noticed. And being in ministry for for the short period that I've been in is just that. A lot of the younger crowd, they want to go and be entertained. And we're trying to find a way to not provide that, but maybe bridge that gap a little bit and find a means to either educate or, you know, bring something that's relevant. Maybe it is just kind of having a more contemporary style worship with good, you know, good music, good solid doctrinal music and then just a short message and then dismissal. But I also think there's a place in service for the Creeds and the Lord's Prayer and all those types of elements that make these services divine in themselves.

**Reuel Sample:** So well, you segue into another topic that I wanted to talk with you about is that you and I are part of the quote old denominations. You're you're a Lutheran. You guys started it all. Yeah. And then I'm Presbyterian and you've got a Methodist church there and and the Baptist Church we are. We're dinosaurs. Do we do? Do we need to be put in the mud pits and forgotten about? Or is there room for the liturgies and the history and the creeds that have made denominations so rich over the centuries?

**Alex Zenk:** Oh, I most certainly think there is a big place at the table for us. And you know, again, whether it's Presbyterian, Baptist, Methodist Methodist or Lutheran or whatever your denominational preferences, you know, there's there's purpose behind what we do. And and I think that with today's world, with social media being as prevalent and people. Losing interest rather quickly with life itself, because social media provides those quick, immediate entertainment factors that we desire. I've noticed and I'm going to kind of. Come around here to the to the answer to the question, but I noticed, like even many people that I run with in my circles, they don't really read books anymore. You know, it's it's either audible books or it's just short little snippets and Google pages and stuff like that. You know, nobody sits down anymore and just relaxes and reads a book to educate themselves on something. And I think that plays a big role in where the church is kind of suffering in itself is we've got kind of a. An issue within these older denominations of two things happening, one, we have churches that are trying to stay relevant with culture and they are moving at a rate that would be more of a universalist approach to handling scripture that every person's welcome and everybody's loved equally. And you know, your sin doesn't matter. And you know, they really try to make this.

**Reuel Sample:** Or even if we call it a sin, yes.

**Alex Zenk:** Yeah, yeah. How dare we call it a sin? And so, but so you got this track happening? And then on the other hand, we've got churches that are staying traditional to their liturgical roots, and they're preaching in their manner. And I think, you know, and it could be that maybe those preaching those sermons might be drier and not so relevant for people. That's a good possibility. But I find that this particular camp is losing people because it's not as engaging or attractive as these other progressive churches. And I've noticed that that was a big deal with the Lutherans back in the early 2000s with the ELCA and their progressive voting that ended up splintering churches out of there and into the Senate that I'm a part of now. The Methodists are going through it now. The Presbyterians have it. The Baptists are dealing with it. Now there's these splinters that are happening and it's basically causing a major divide in the church because now we have these essentially two sides of the road. We have this progressive ideology that's sitting in one camp and then we have the conservative biblical. Truth that

is in this other camp, and they they don't they're not mutually connected, and there's no way without educating the people to draw people back to the truth of God's word.

**Reuel Sample:** Part of the the tradition of. Denominations are the creeds, confessions and the history, and we have gotten away from that. Oh, absolutely, is that you go into many modern churches today, they can't say the Apostles Creed, they can't say, even say, the Lord's Prayer, and they can't tell you what happened. Churches three wise ten years before. Yeah. How is that hurting us? Well, I think

**Alex Zenk:** I think not having the Creed's kind of in the forefront of the church takes away from the proclamation of what we believe, and I've made this comment to my congregation a number of times. The reasons behind why we say the Nicene Creed in the Apostles Creed is because we are actively participating in proclaiming our beliefs. If you if you come to the church and you just sit there and listen and don't actually partake in anything, what are you getting out of it? You're just, you know, you could play the sponge and absorb stuff, but you don't get to reciprocate and actually demonstrate your knowledge in your faith. And I'm not saying you have to go and do all these works and to show your fruit to people. I'm saying, you know, as a Christian, you've got to be able to proclaim this. You know, Paul tells us that if you believe in these things, then you will be saved. If Jesus Christ is Lord and God raised him from the grave, then you will be saved. But you have to be able to proclaim that. And the creeds give us that, that foundation. And, you know, because they cover, in a sense, the most basic, essential fundamental pieces to the Christian faith. And if we move into the confessions, then we get into some of the deeper belief systems behind the different denominations. Right now, in my podcast, I'm doing a journey through the Augsburg confession, and I'm teaching people who listen to my show who don't understand the Lutheran theology I'm teaching them. This is the history around the Augsburg confession. This is the articles and the confession. This is what they mean and how did they have effect in this time period when they were written in 15 30 all the way to today's world? And I know there's other podcasts out there that do great jobs with the Baptist confessions or the Presbyterian confessions, but these things are fundamental to the church because they the ground and they route the church in their belief.

**Alex Zenk:** If we, if we're not rooted in the creeds of confessions, then we're kind of off doing our own thing and we fail. And in essence, to find. Our footing because we're

trying to be again relevant and popular in the churches and to the world's eyes. And so we, we they stray away from the creeds and confessions as a means of what we believe, like if you were to go to some of the big churches. And go to their website and look at what their beliefs are with their statement of faith. They're pretty generic and they're they're kind of broad. In many cases, they don't actually get to the very finite pieces of the Christian faith. And and I think is if we move away from the creeds and confessions, it's going to do damage to the church because people are going to go to church and they're going to quote unquote worship a Jesus that they don't even know about. Mm hmm. And I mean, ligand here puts out, and I'm sure you've seen this look, and he puts out a report every couple of years on the state of the theology. And I've read through them a couple of times in the past on my show, and it's alarming to see each year that the report comes out. The decrease in just basic fundamental knowledge of the Christian. And I think that is it's two part one. Its church's failing to teach these things and to its people, not going to church because they don't think churches are relevant in their lives.

**Reuel Sample:** Both are incredibly off the mark is that is that I love the creeds, I love the confessions and when we spend time talking about the creeds and reciting the creeds and not just reciting them but saying and vocalizing the creeds in church, not only does it, it give incredible vocalization to what I believe, but it connects us with Christians who have gone on before. I mean, these are these are ancient and and incredibly, the thought processes behind these creeds and confessions, at least the ancient ones. Augsburg for you, Heidelberg Westminster confession the thought process behind those is unmatched. I don't know what they've done in the Lutheran Church, but every everything that they've done in the Presbyterian Church past Westminster has been, quite frankly, awful. The Presbyterians came out with the confession in nineteen sixty seven that basically denies the authority of scripture and the shorter. The shorter confession of nineteen eighty five denies the deity of Christ, and they just they just don't seem to get it. So how do we go back to getting getting our people in the pews, not just those of us who just love the creeds, but how do we go back to getting people excited in the pews about the creeds, the confessions, the historical challenges of the church and just even seeing the the the the the richness of denominations? How do we get back to that?

**Alex Zenk:** That's that's the question that seems to be plaguing all of us because it's one that we we want to try to have an answer to. And and I would love to have the perfect solution. But, you know, I don't know if there is a perfect answer or even a good answer for it, but I think it's we got to start local in our community. And, you know, that's our biggest impact, immediate people in our towns and our countryside. Those are the people we need to be engaging with, and those are the people we need to teach through these. And so I think it goes beyond just the pulpit on Sunday mornings, but there has to be teaching classes like I host a Bible study for my church every other week and we're going through the book of Romans right now. We've gone through the gospel of Mark. We've done a little bit of Old Testament and we've done some stuff around Christmas, but it requires us to. Slow down and really appreciate the scriptures as they are. And I think that's our our first and foremost mission field is the local community, and we have to find a way to reach those people, whether it is being more flexible with service times or having another service time inviting these individuals in. That needs to be our first essential engagement. And then I think we can spread our wings and utilize social media and the internet and podcasting for instances. Another means to continue to educate and share the gospel and hopes that people will listen to us and watch our videos and just take what we say and then continue on researching in their own right. You know, like, I've got two shows in my kind of arsenal, really. I do one that's on Fridays, and that's a exegetical verse by verse explanation of of certain books that I'm working through in the Bible on my show.

**Alex Zenk:** And like right now, I'm in Ecclesiastes and I'm working through some of the wisdom books and I'm teaching through what's happening here. And I've gotten a lot of people that are responding to me after they listen to the show and they're like, I never considered this to be as relevant in my life is, you know, how you made it. And I think it's just what it comes down to is there's people we can impact, you know, around the world. Like, I have listeners all over the world on mine and I talk to people actively around the world and and I get some good feedback. But again, those people aren't in my immediate community and they're not in my church. And so my church has to be my first and foremost approach and they have to have my attention. And so I do the podcast to help supplement more, you know, teachings for the church, and I do the podcast to kind of throw out the seed into the world and let it go. And so I think, you know, to draw upon the importance, I think church history has to be taught. I think we have to do segments, whether it's in church, in a teaching, maybe it's even hosting a conference once a year

and we we walk through. Basic fundamentals of the church, like why do we do these things? Why are the creeds of confessions important? What are the confessions? Because I'm sure many people even in, you know, in the big denominations have never read the Westminster or the Hindenburg or the 16:18 or even the Augsburg. They just they just don't.