

## **Faith**

Shepherd of the Mountains embraces a Trinitarian faith as expressed historically in the ecumenical creeds (Apostles, Nicene, and Athanasian). Shepherd of the Mountains voluntarily chooses to belong to denomination that shares in the confession of and mission with Jesus Christ as taught in Bible. We believe without reservation that the Scriptures of the Old and the New Testament are the written Word of God and the only rule and norm of faith and of practice. In addition, Shepherd of the Mountains embraces the historical, orthodox faith as expressed through the Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church.

Shepherd of the Mountains teaches and responds to the love of the Triune God. Father/Creator; Son/Savior/Jesus; Holy Spirit/Sanctifier/Healer. The three persons of the Trinity are coequal and coeternal, one God. We accept and teach the Bible-based teachings of Martin Luther that inspired the Reformation of the Christian Church. Though we identify ourselves unapologetically as Christian people, we also uniquely uphold the teachings that can be summarized in three short phrases: Grace alone, Faith alone, Scripture alone. Sola Christus.

### **Sola Gratia – Grace Alone**

God loves the people of the world. Jesus, God made flesh, reveals the nature and character of God and God's disposition to bring love, salvation, and the presence of His Kingdom into people's lives outside of their works or sense of self-righteousness. All we receive from God is a gift of His grace.

### **Sola Fide – Faith Alone**

By His suffering, death, and resurrection, Jesus shares the grace of God and the gifts of forgiveness and eternal life to all people. Christ Jesus is this Good News and those who embrace Jesus as Savior and follow Him as Lord live under His grace, love and mercy from now and through eternity. God is the giver of the gift of faith in Christ and calls us to respond to His gift of faith by living faithful lives.

### **Sola Scriptura – Scripture Alone**

The Bible is the revelation of God's grace, purposes and will for the world. Christians call the Bible "God's Word." In the Bible we experience the story of salvation as well as witness the incarnation of God's nature, character and purposes throughout history culminating in the life and sacrifice of Jesus as the perfect revelation of God. As it is written in 2 Timothy 3:16, "All scripture is good for teaching, reproof, for training in righteous" and for the equipping of people who follow Jesus into actions that enable God to fulfill His mission in the world and bring glory to God.

## **Salvation**

Shepherd of the Mountains believes that God saves us by grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone. There is nothing we can do to make ourselves right with God. In Jesus, God has done everything necessary for our salvation. When we put our faith in Jesus, his righteousness is credited to us and our sins are forgiven for his sake. (Ephesians 2:8-9, Romans 3:21-26, Romans 4:23-24)

## **How God works in us**

Shepherd of the Mountains believes God's Holy Spirit works in our lives through the Means of Grace. God's Word teaches both "Law and Gospel." In the Law, God restrains sin by threat of punishment, reveals our sin in contrast to his perfect will, and guides believers into good works. In the Gospel, God reveals the good news of our salvation, offers forgiveness of sins, works faith and enables us to do the good works that please him. We believe that the Gospel is a "who" and not necessarily a "what." Jesus is the Gospel. Jesus is the focal point of our lives together in "Loving Jesus, Loving Others and Living for Jesus." We celebrate the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Baptism is God's means of grace, giving new birth to both children and adults. The Holy Spirit also works through

the Lord's Supper to strengthen faith and give the forgiveness of sins. (Romans 3:20, John 1:16-17, 1 Peter 1:23, John 3:3-6, Acts 2:38-39, Titus 3:4-7, 1 Corinthians 11:23-27)

Shepherd of the Mountains believes that God works in and through the gathering of His people into and through faith communities (commonly called, "churches", what Jesus said was the gathering of "two or more in His name" Matthew 18:20). The Church consists of all those who trust in Christ wherever they are found all over the world. Jesus followers come together as a community to be equipped for life as ambassador of God's Kingdom. We believe that the Church must be defined as much by action as it is by confession. We define the Church in light of: 1) Who God Is and What God has done and is doing; 2) Who He has made and Who He is making the Church to Be; and 3) What He has saved, created, empowered the Church to do. Shepherd of the Mountains believes in church "health" just as much as church "growth." As we trust in Jesus and are surrendered to His will, ways and power, the Spirit molds us in the likeness of Jesus bringing forth fruits of His presence as well as personal and corporate growth. We believe that the primary purpose of the gathering of God's people is disciple-making. We believe that mission is not what a church does as much as how a church and a disciple of Jesus actually lives. We gather around the Means of Grace (Word and Sacrament). The church is the Body of Christ and is called to worship and serve him. Christ created his church to preach repentance and forgiveness of sins throughout the world and to make disciples of all nations. (Ephesians 4:4-6, Matthew 18:20, Luke 24:47, Matthew 28:18-20)

### **We are a Sacramental Church**

Shepherd of the Mountains is also a "sacramental" faith community. Martin Luther wrote, "A Sacrament is a sacred act - instituted by God; containing certain visible means connected with His Word; by which God offers, gives and seals unto us the forgiveness of sins...essentially a sacrament is a means of grace. A means of grace is a way God creates faith, bring about conversion, justification and sanctification."

Shepherd of the Mountains proactively embraces this notion and deep theology of how God reveals Himself sacramentally to the world through and in the acts of ekklesia (the Greek word translated "church" in many bibles, that being, the gathered faith community, i.e. baptism, communion and the Word of God). Shepherd of the Mountains also believes in the significant and transformational reality that those who follow Jesus, in other words, the WE of the Body of Christ are sacraments. God INITIATED and INSTITUED our restored relationship with Him. Jesus followers are "chosen" and called by God, established in a new identity because of new life in Jesus. The Body of Christ, the value of discipleship, the mission and purpose of living our lives in and through His Spirit is God's idea. We as people who love and follow Jesus, are a visible means that God uses to communicate the truth of His Word. We are the hands and feet of Jesus today. WE are the Body of Christ in the world. We are agents of reconciliation. We offer the love that Jesus gave to us to others. We love because He first loved us. We love "one another as I (Jesus) have loved." We forgive each other. We extend God's healing hand through prayer. We in our own small but significant manner are "outward signs which have God's command and promise." A Sacrament is a sign of the covenant of grace and those who are called as followers of Jesus embody God's covenant in our world. through the Holy Spirit, the real presence of Jesus lives in us and through us in our relationships and bridges we build in our communities.

Shepherd of the Mountains believes that God uses a multitude of expressions of Himself and His love through people who are part of His Body. This does not mean that WE do the actual work. We simply bear the presence of the ONE whose work has been, is being and is going to be done in our lives. Jesus is the one who saves, justifies, and sanctifies. It is His work alone. We are "sent" to the world to "go and make disciples." We are a means of God's grace in and through our mission. In that way, every follower is a sacrament. Every person who loves Jesus is poured out, broken, bringing the washing of new life that only comes through Jesus into the presence of the relationships in which we have been blessed. We (as the gathered community of faith) not only handle the means of grace, we ARE a means of grace.