

Bishop's Sermon
Saskatchewan Synod Convention Sunday, June 15, 2008
Genesis 18:1-15; Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19; Romans 5:1-8; Matthew 9:35-10:8

This is written and distributed to the congregations of Saskatchewan Synod to be read at worship on Convention Sunday, June 15, 2008. It is based on the gospel and epistle texts for the day and addressed to the congregations and members of Saskatchewan Synod.

A Letter to the Congregations of Saskatchewan Synod
in the manner of the epistles of St Paul,
From Cindy, a baptized child of God,
pastor and bishop of Saskatchewan Synod,
by the call of God and the church,
To the congregations of Saskatchewan Synod,
who are given a commission by Christ Jesus
to proclaim that the kingdom of heaven has come near:
Grace and peace to you in the name of Jesus Christ.

While this message is being read in your congregation,
the delegates, visitors and guests present at the
Twelfth Biennial Convention of the Saskatchewan Synod
are concluding their meeting in a celebration of Word and Sacrament
at Messiah Lutheran Church in Assiniboia.

The convention is gathered under the theme "In Mission for Others: A People Called". During the convention
the delegates are giving direction to the Synod Council and the Bishop,
and making commitments together,
about ways that our synod can best respond to God's call
to be a church in mission for others.

The Saskatchewan Synod
is 130 congregations in Saskatchewan and Western Manitoba
joined in a common confession of faith
and committed to living out our relationship in faith with one another
and with sisters and brothers
in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada.

As congregations, members and leaders
gathered within the body of Christ, the Church,

we enjoy the fellowship of faith
and we share the burdens of responsibility with one another
for the greater good.

That “greater good” is the mission that Jesus gives us, the mission that
defines our existence as a church.

A church without mission is a club of companionable people –
nice to be with
but destined to die out when the last member moves away.

But that’s not the way God constitutes the Church.

We understand through scripture and the Lutheran confessions
that God has a mission,
and the Church exists to fulfill God’s mission.

Called. Gathered. Enlightened. Made Holy.

That’s how Martin Luther describes the Church in the Small Catechism.

Called first from among the chosen people of Israel,
the ones to whom God sent Jesus
to announce the fulfillment of God’s promises.

Called later from among the Gentiles, the outsiders,
everyone who can hear God’s word of promise and forgiveness
and is embraced by God’s grace.

God through the Holy Spirit keeps calling the Church into being,
keeps calling the Church to trust in God’s faithfulness
to lead and guide us into ways
that will draw all people into God’s love.

We are called and given a mission,
to proclaim in words and actions that God’s reign has come near,
and to bring our world closer to God’s ways of peace, justice, mercy
and love.

So we are called.

The church is Gathered.

Gathered up as ones who have responded to the invitation
to be claimed by God,
to be loved into life,
and to be blessed to be a blessing to others.

Baptized into Christ Jesus we are gathered into one fold, one flock.
Each one is known and precious in God’s sight.

And yet, when we live and work together, “gathered up”,
then we embody God’s love most fully.
That’s why we say the church is the Body of Christ,
gathered into one as the expression of the unity that God gives to us
in Christ Jesus our Lord.
We are gathered.

And God opens our eyes, enlightens us, within the Church.
In every generation the church has been blessed
to have new insights into God’s scriptures,
into God’s unfolding creation,
into what it means to be the faithful of God.
“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow.”
And yet, over the centuries, God has enlightened the church
about how the disciples of Jesus can follow faithfully
in response to new situations and new opportunities.
Abraham didn’t hesitate to welcome three strangers to dinner.
David figured out how to make a monarchy work for God’s mission.
Joseph accepted the scandal of a pregnant fiancé.
The Nicene church leaders compiled a statement of faith
to answer the controversies of their day.
Luther and others reformed the church for coming generations.
Martin Luther King Jr. led a whole generation into repentance
for centuries of church-sanctioned prejudice.
In our day we ask God to enlighten us to respond faithfully
as a people called to be in mission for others.

There it is.
We are bold to pray to God because God has made us holy,
made the church holy.
That doesn’t mean we don’t sin or that the church doesn’t make mistakes.
Try as we might, we’d never succeed making ourselves holy.
And if we keep trying to be sinless,
we’ll be putting our energies in the wrong direction.
That’s what Luther meant when he said, “Sin boldly.”
You can’t make yourself holy in God’s eyes.
That we are made holy is God’s doing alone.
“At the right time God died for the ungodly.”
And in the death of Christ Jesus for the sake of the ungodly ones
– that’s you and me and all creation –

we have peace with God.
That's what being made holy is about.
God making us holy. God making us right with God.
And in this world, and in this time and place,
that's the good news that we are called to share.
That in Christ Jesus God has made us right with God.
That's the most important thing for living.
The most important thing for being the church as well.
To know that it's God's church,
made so by the self-giving love of Christ Jesus,
and dedicated to showing the same kind of love to others,
marked by grace, mercy and forgiveness.

So what happens when the Church is the church that God wants it to be?
Well, it takes its direction from the life and ministry of Jesus.
As the Body of Christ
we are about teaching and proclaiming good news as Jesus did.
With the authority given us by Christ,
we put our energies into healing a troubled world,
and working for reconciliation and wholeness
in the lives of people we know,
in the communities around us
and in creation itself.

The faithful church trusts in God's promise
that the good work that was begun in us will be fulfilled,
and that all the world will be gathered up
into God's new creation restored in love.

You know, the world needs what the church has,
a sure and certain hope that life and death are in God's hands,
and that God doesn't fumble.
God has invited us into God's own mission
of taking away the power of all things
that are dark, and fearful, and hurtful, and death-dealing –
and in their place giving the world the light and life of Christ.

The Saskatchewan Synod, and your own congregation,
and you, by your baptism into Christ,
are part of God's mission.
Called by God, given the power of God's love,

putting ourselves under the direction and example of Jesus,
we have a marvelous calling.
We have good news to share, healing to bring, forgiveness to announce,
and a warm and wide welcome to offer in Christ's name
to a world, to friends and family, to neighbors that need God's love.

And so, in the name of Jesus,
go forth this week and in the days and weeks to come,
confident that God loves you,
and bold to let others know that they, too, are invited to live in the
grace and mercy of God.

May God make it so. Amen.