

Sermon
For
Luke 1:67-69 / Gathering of OL-SC / 1-9-10

By
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Greetings and peace and grace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ!

I think that it can be easily agreed upon by most of us here today, that the majority of us here for this gathering come with a great sense of anxiety, fear and urgency regarding the recent decisions of the ELCA Churchwide Assembly and their decisions to make room for the blessing of same-sex unions and to allow persons in committed same gendered relationships to enter into the Office of Ordained Ministry.

These decisions by our denomination have left many of us struggling; they have many of us afraid and worried and especially angry; many of us are wondering if there is any hope left to live as faithful Lutheran Christians in a denomination that seems to be drifting further away from her catholic and apostolic heritage.

But is this whole story of the situation in which we find ourselves? I think the answer to that is no. We need to think deeply, you see, about our feelings towards these decisions that we believe have been in error; we need to be cautious about those things that we believe are our deepest held convictions and the feelings that flow from having those convictions challenged in ways we never thought possible. Fear and anxiety, you see; anger and confusion: these things are the devil's playground. And these feelings, the devil will use to turn whatever ounce of hope we may have into utter and complete despair; precisely because the devil wants us to avoid completely what God in Christ Jesus is calling us to do – to love each other as the heavenly Father first loves us. As the beloved apostle John writes “...since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.”

This love of which the beloved apostle writes is, of course, the very love of Jesus Christ. And the Epiphany season that we've now entered is a blessed time to examine just that – the love of God revealed in Jesus as the Savior of the world. Early in Israel's history a Messiah was prophesied; Balaam's oracle tells us of a “star” and “scepter” who would come out of Jacob – a ruler who would lead all nations to himself, just as a star would lead the Magi to the holy Nativity.

This Messiah is the One about whom Zechariah spoke in similar fashion, when moved by the Holy Spirit, he spoke that the God of Israel was indeed blessed,

“...for he has looked favorably on people and set them free, He has raised up a mighty savior for us in the house of his servant David, as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us. Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors, and has remembered his holy covenant, the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham, to grant us that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear...”

Without fear. Those who serve Christ; those who have been redeemed by Christ’s precious blood, who have been joined to His death and resurrection through the promised Word in Baptism; we who have been saved from sin and death by the grace and love of God, we serve Christ *without fear*. Without fear of our enemies, without fear of the devil; instead, we who serve Christ serve Him with freedom, we serve with joy and thankfulness; we serve with love, because in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, love and freedom have won the day, love and freedom are victorious; and love and freedom guide our every endeavor like a star in sky, like the Morning Star – Jesus Himself – bright and beautiful as He leads all people to Himself.

Now, for the remainder of the day, we will gather to hear Dr. Crumley’s reflections on the recent decisions of the ’09 Assembly; we will hear resolutions that will be put forth to our upcoming Synod Assembly for consideration as many of us pray that the SC Synod will be able to exercise her bound conscience; we will talk and commiserate with each other over coffee and at the water cooler and in the hallways; and, we will pray and call upon God to be with us as we plan and organize ourselves to stand firm in our deepest held convictions, that as Lutherans, we believe are upheld by Holy Scripture and Great Christian Tradition; but...there is something else that Holy Spirit speaks to us today, something that in this Epiphany season is extremely valuable to remember on this day and about this day:

Today, we do not rally ourselves *just* around the particular issue of homosexuality; we do not posture with pride as if we have the upper hand in some sort of theological boxing match; nor do we assume that our anger is completely righteous nor our presumptions about God’s will.

What we do today is to gather in confession; we gather to acknowledge humbly our fears and frustrations that have resulted from the challenge to our deepest biblically-held convictions; today, we make known that our hearts and minds and consciences can be captive *only* to the Word of God. But, it is important to understand that the only means to open our hearts and consciences’ to God’s Word is to make humble confession of our

frustrations and fears, and to turn to those fears over to the sanctity of the mercy and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the One in whom God reveals the hope of all salvation.

So today, more than anything, you are invited. You are invited to bring forward your fears and bring forward your anger; bring them to the Font of hope and the Table of blessing. Remember that in your baptism, God has given you all hope and assurance that in this life, neither fear of death nor evil will consume you. Gather at the Lord's Table and be renewed and strengthened to stand up and honor God and especially your neighbor by speaking and acting in truth and love. Up here you see, is not the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; up here, hidden in water, and in bread and wine, and grasped by faith alone is Christ, up here is the true church, the body of Christ, given for you and for me.

I encourage you today, brothers and sister in Christ, above all else, to exchange whatever fears you have for love. For lest we speak and act out of fear, we'll make no better sound than that of a noisy gong or clanging cymbal, to use the words of St. Paul. But....if we hear the call of the risen Lord to come to Him, to draw near to Him, and to see Him revealed in all His heavenly glory, if we come to Him in faith, our fear and anger will give way to love and hope. For Zechariah was right – the mercy promised to our ancestors has been shown; it is shown in the glory of Jesus Christ. For in the grace and glory of the crucified and risen Jesus, God has, is, and will continue to rescue us from our enemies. And now, we are able to serve Him...*without fear*. In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, amen.