



Virginia Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Bishop Mauney's Sermon for Synod Assembly 2016

June 12, 2016

It's a privilege to be with you today and I bring greetings to you from the whole Synod.

I certainly am glad that you might hear me this Sunday while the Synod Assembly meets at Roanoke College in Salem, VA.

Over 400 rostered leaders and lay leaders with a Youth Assembly of around 100 youth and adults will be gathered to worship, study, have fellowship, elect leadership- all under the theme of Ambassadors for Christ: A Heart for Worship.

This is a very special time in the life of our Synod. When we come together for our next Synod Assembly, we will be in the midst of the 500th year of the Reformation. While many would emphasize the reforming of the church, the culture, or the institutions as the heart of Luther's Reformation, I would see those simply as the results.

The heart of Luther's Reformation lay in the way Luther insisted that the crucified and risen Christ be placed at the very center of the Good News about our true relationship with God. Rather than an angry God needing to be appeased, Luther rediscovered a loving God coming to rescue us from real powers of evil, sin, and death in order that we might be His, The Small Catechism says. To a church that had removed Christ from the center and had left sinful humans before an angry God whom we needed to placate with good works, Luther rediscovered Jesus Christ as the revealer of a God who in love for us came down through manger, cross, and empty tomb to rescue us FROM all that separates us from God.

The Gospel of the living Word of God announced to us in manger, cross, tomb – the Gospel offered to us in sermon, absolution, baptism, Holy Communion – the Gospel awakening faith as one shares it with another – this Gospel forms the heart of our worship. And Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit is reconciling the world by revealing a loving God through the announced Gospel: and that's the heartbeat of our worship!

For this Gospel we come seeking worship each week, where we receive the forgiveness that restores our relationship with the God of love, where we get the faith to embrace the Gospel with our hearts again, and where we share the Spirit to praise and thank God FOR this precious Gospel, and where we know the love that unites us with all who need to hear the Gospel over and over. We Lutherans have a Heart for worship. We seek that heart, and crave it, and love it. That's why it's the theme of our assembly, Ambassadors for Christ: A Heart for Worship

Take the woman in our gospel lesson this morning. Her heart seems bursting with gladness as she washes and anoints Jesus' feet with tears of joy. Her heart has known a full welcome and

acceptance in the forgiving words and gestures of Jesus prior to this anointing. The host Simon, thinks she is over the top, but Jesus points out that while Simon didn't even have the heart to welcome Jesus, to offer even the basics in Jewish hospitality of the day, this woman Jesus said, had a heart for worship in her overflowing thanksgiving for the relationship of love and acceptance she had heard and seen done for her in Jesus. She loved deeply and she gave deeply, she worshipped Jesus. Because where her treasure was there her heart was also and she treasured Jesus. Simon had no stomach for it, and no heart for either- loving or giving.

How about the Old Testament lesson of the prophet Nathan speaking a parable to King David? Notice how Nathan speaks to the powerful with a parable about weakness. He captures the heart of the shepherd King David with the story of the taking and killing of a single lamb. And so David has a public heart for justice and says, "The man who has done this deserves to die, because he had no pity."

But in the previous chapter we've watched David himself act secretly. He didn't go out as king to battle. He saw Bathsheba, saw her from a distance, and soon involved many servants in sending for her. He took the lamb, the only wife of Uriah, and seduced her in private. And when she became pregnant, well then King David secretly involved servants and staff in seeking to tempt and discredit Uriah when he returned home, her own soldier husband who was fighting for him.

He then sent a top secret message by the very hand of Uriah to his general in the field, Joab, commanding Joab to put Uriah in the most vulnerable place in the battle until he was killed, no matter how many of David's own army would have to die with him.

So then Joab secretly plans to put a whole regiment of his army to be put in grave danger and loose many good soldiers, many wonderful fathers, many beloved sons and brothers all for the effort to make sure Uriah was killed in the front lines of battle.

You see David incorporated his whole kingdom in his secret small sin and the very King who no longer went out to fight battles in the spring secretly fought a huge one secretly defeating his very own soldiers who had gone out to fight in their love for him. It's a great story about the cost and widening of the power of sin in our life. They're not a small indiscretion, but a lust that changed the integrity of many and actually killed many. And so Nathan says, You are the man, and we hear the sinner is convicted by the word of gods speaker. So each week if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

There is within our worship then a beginning word of confrontation about our bondage to sin, our secret thoughts and desires, that which we have done and left undone, that we have not loved God or our neighbor. That we have made others near or distant in other lands collateral damage for our own way of life, have made others endure terrible conditions that they suffer each and every day. Confession begins You are the man, and for those who know this, absolution ends as a woman anointing the feet of their Lord with kisses.

So isn't it wonderful how Galatians comes between the Old Testament and the gospel acting like a bridge for the heart of all our worship? Paul writes: We are gentile sinners yet we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. I have been

crucified with Christ and it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me and the life I now live by faith I live for the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

He died for you, who loved you and gave himself for you. He says child I baptized you in my name, like a beloved lamb, I marked you as mine, and nothing shall separate you from me, nothing, forever. I am the crucified and risen Lord of life. And I forgive you what you cannot forgive about yourself. I love you.

This is the message at the heart of our worship. It declares the heart of God who loves. It opens our heart with forgiveness to thankfully praise the relationship with God that is the foundation for all the rest of our relationships in life.

We don't just talk about it. We actually do it over and over in confession and absolution, in our preaching, in the new birth and new life of baptism, in the meal of Christ real presence for you over and over; in worship God is present for you.

As 2017 approaches, someone may ask, "So what is about you Lutherans?" Well, you can answer: we are ambassadors for Christ and we do that well sometimes, and sometimes we don't, but I know this we sure have a heart for worship.