



SUNDAY, JULY 9, 2017

The Sunday following the 2017 ELCIC National Convention

Grace to you and peace in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. I bring you greetings from your siblings in Christ recently gathered together at the National Convention of our church as well as from all of siblings from coast to coast to coast that make up this part of the family of God we know as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada.

Let me share with you a little bit of what has been going on these past few days as we have gathered in Winnipeg. We've spent time together in worship, prayer, song and business. This year we join with Lutherans around the world to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation. Our convention theme, *Liberated by God's Grace*, is the theme of the international commemoration along with its subthemes: salvation—not for sale, human beings—not for sale, and creation—not for sale. Throughout our convention we have looked at different aspects of these themes – in worship, in presentations and convention actions. I'm very excited about this important commemoration. It gives us the opportunity to deepen our ecumenical relationships as we reflect together on how we have come to be separate church bodies and how God is calling us to healing and to reconciliation. We are remembering together that there is just one body of Christ, and recommitting to working towards making that a living reality.

In today's gospel we hear these well-known words of Jesus: "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." Matthew 11:28–30

I have always found these the most comforting words in scripture. We hear this text often used at funeral. The idea of laying down your burdens and finding rest is so appealing—it gives us comfort as we prepare to let go of a loved one, and it gives us comfort when we ourselves are lonely or stressed.



But as I reflect on this text in the light of our theme—Liberated by God’s Grace—I’ve had to think about the burdens we give up and the burdens we take on. When we acknowledge that we are Liberated by God’s Grace, we give up all fear of our own salvation. We accept that we are made righteous because of Christ’s action not because of our own actions. For people in our society who are constantly trying to justify themselves, to prove themselves by what they do, and what they own, and what they wear, and how they look—this is good news indeed! God loves you for who and how you are. We are free to get off the hamster wheel of trying to achieve success. This is a very heavy burden to lay down.

But there are burdens we take on as well. We can no longer live as isolated self-made people. We have to acknowledge the primary role of God in our lives and our interconnection with the rest of God’s family and indeed with creation itself. We can’t just take care of ourselves anymore, we need to act out God’s love and care. We have to take all those “not for sales” seriously—salvation, human beings and creation are not for sale. It makes a difference about how we spend our time, how we use our money, how we consider not just ourselves but also our neighbour, how we feel compelled to speak out for justice and peace especially at times we would rather stay silent.

That’s why convention deliberated on a statement to the Muslim community in Canada this week. We need to speak out about the increasing incidents of hate crimes in Canada. That’s why convention deliberated on interfaith guidelines, to help us get to know people of other faiths that live in our communities. That’s why we continue to work to address affordable housing and homelessness and responsible resource extraction. Why we are committed to reconciliation with Indigenous peoples in Canada. Why we pray for peace in the Holy Land. Why we care about the justice and corrections systems in Canada. Why we speak out against gender-based violence and human trafficking. These are all ways we live out our lives that have been liberated by God’s grace. We are compelled by our love of God to work for the liberation of others.



Living the life of being Liberated by God's Grace isn't always an easy one. So what is the balance between these burdens we give up and the burdens we take on?

Martin Luther wrote about these words from Matthew. He said: "It is as if Christ wanted to say: Do not be vexed by what I lay upon you in the world. It is a yoke and a burden for the flesh, and it is called a hard way and a narrow gate. But just cling to me, and I will make it nice for you, pleasant and easy, giving you enough strength to travel the road with ease. What is more, you will experience how it becomes pleasant and sweet for you." (LW21, p. 246)

In other words, God promises us that God's burden is light. And it is. It may not always feel that way. But it is. It's light because we have the assurance of God's presence with us, and God's love supporting us. It's light because we have others—members of our congregations, members of the wider church, ecumenical and other partners, walking and working alongside us, sharing the load.

At the closing worship of The Lutheran World Federation Assembly held in May in Windhoek, Namibia, we were charged with these words:

The business of this Assembly is over, but our work is just beginning. Our songs in this tent will ring hollow unless we find the energy to sing the Lord's song to people unfamiliar with the melodies of grace. Our plans and projects will fail unless we abide in Christ. The whole world awaits the freedom Christ offers. The whole world becomes the place where God is active, where the Spirit offers gifts, where we and our churches become alive with the freedom of Christ Jesus, which is truly free. Go to the north, to the south, to the east and to the west and proclaim freedom, and live the gift of God's grace.

May it be so, for me and for you. Amen.