



*Sermon for July 12, 2015*  
*Closing of National Convention*

**Prepared by ELCIC National Bishop Susan C. Johnson**

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- 2 Samuel 6:1-5, 12b-19
- Ephesians 1:3-14
- Mark 6: 14-29



**G**race to you and peace in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. I bring you greetings from your sisters and brothers gathered together at the National Convention of our church as well as from all of your sisters and brothers 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 Edmonton. This year we join with Lutherans around the world as we begin to commemorate the 500<sup>th</sup> 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 and bible study, in presentations and convention actions. I'm very excited about this important commemoration. Over the next two years we will have 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 will remember together that there is just one body of Christ, and recommit to working towards making that a living reality.

We've spent time together in worship, prayer, singing and bible study. We've been living out our commitment to spirited discipleship and to grow in spiritual renewal. This is the heart of who we are as people of faith, and we are coming away renewed and refreshed.

We've spent a lot of time doing business. Some of it may not be everyone's cup of tea—passing budgets and amending constitutions—but we have also had time to debate many important issues that relate to every member of our church: Climate justice, our relationships with Indigenous Peoples, welcoming refugees, and the criminal justice and corrections systems in Canada.

Let me share with you a story that I heard from Rev. Martin Junge, General Secretary of The Lutheran World Federation, at the recent meeting of the LWF council. Earlier this year as he visited our sister church in Russia and learned that in St. Petersburg there was a Lutheran church that was made out of wood—St. Mary’s church. During the siege of St. Petersburg during Second World War, in the midst of the winter, the eyes of desperate people turned to that church and its wood—enough to provide fire for thousands of people so they would not die because of cold. The church leaders allowed it: the church was dismantled, bit by bit, for neighbors to use its wood and light small fires to keep them alive. What a symbol and what a powerful story! It speaks to what it means to be a servant church, giving up itself for the sake of the life of the people. At the end of the siege nothing was left from that church—a small plaque reminds today where it stood once. But thousands of people managed to survive because of that church that gave itself away. And when the time came that the city wanted to build a shopping mall on that space, it was the citizens who rose up and refused to allow it to happen, honouring the sacrifice that the church had made.



If spiritual renewal is the heart of who we are as Lutheran Christians, then these actions of compassionate justice are the limbs—the legs and arms of who we are. They take the work of our heart and put them into action in our world.

We have also had a lot of time to celebrate at convention. We have celebrated the partnerships we share: with Canadian Lutheran World Relief and KAIROS, with the Anglican Church of Canada and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, with our schools—Lutheran College and Lutheran Collegiate Bible Institute. We’ve celebrated the gifts that have been shared across our church—people willing to serve on National Church Council and the other committees of the church.

In some ways, what we have been doing together is reminiscent of the reading from Second Samuel. David gathered all the chosen men of Israel. We have gathered elected delegates from across our church. David and all the house of Israel were dancing before the Lord with all their might, with songs and lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals. We haven’t seen a lot of dancing, and there has been an absence of lyres and harps, but our worship and praise of our loving God has been just as joyful and uplifting.

David sacrificed an ox and a fatling. We don’t make any animal sacrifices at National Convention, but we do give offerings at Opening and Closing worship services to give back to God from the blessings we have received.

David blessed the people in the name of the Lord of hosts and we have certainly remembered you all in prayers this week. And while the people of Israel were given each a cake of bread, a portion of meat, and a cake of raisins, we gathered in a banquet last night to celebrate those who have shared their gifts with the church.



Finally, the lesson ends this way: all the people went back to their homes. And we are about to do the same thing. The convention is coming to a close, but that does not mean our work has ended. Now we all are charged with carrying out the decisions we have made.

You know, when I was first elected National Bishop I was very concerned about the direction we were headed. Our resources both in terms of people and finances were receding rapidly. I wasn't sure the ELCIC was going to survive.

But I have learned a few things over the years. As Paul wrote in Romans: hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. (Romans 5:5)

Hope does not disappoint us. I've learned this from being involved in The Lutheran World Federation and realizing we are not a small church! We are a medium sized church!! It's time for us to look at the glass not as half empty. And not even as half full! Rather, our cups are full to overflowing by the abundance of God's grace!

This is what I've learned from God and this is what I've learned from you as I've traveled across our church. Through your faithfulness, through your witness, through your creativity, through your hopefulness, I have learned that hope does not disappoint. We are liberated by God's grace! We are blessed with a hope in Jesus Christ that will not disappoint us. We are being strengthened to meet the challenges ahead. As LWF General Secretary Martin Junge challenged us at a recent lecture at Waterloo Lutheran Seminary, "we are called to be people of faith for people in need". Or as we continue to proclaim, we are a church *In Mission For Others*. Alleluia! Amen.