

Happenings At Hope

September - October ~ Vol. 3, No. 5

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Worship & Study

Bible Class & Sunday School

9:30am

The Divine Service

Sundays 10:30am

Wednesdays 7pm

Ladies' & Men's Bible Studies

1st and 2nd Saturdays of the
month respectively, at 9am

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Evangelical
Lutheran
Synod

From the Pastor

School has started again, which naturally brings to mind to the topic of learning. And when it comes to learning, it is good that we learn from many teachers, not only those with whom we come into regular, direct contact. Keeping that truth in mind, in this issue of *Happenings At Hope* you will be learning—just not from me.

In this issue, you will find three articles written by ELS pastors from all over the country. The Rev. Paul Fries serves as the communications director for our synod. He is based in Mankato, MN. The Rev. Matthew Luttmann serves as the pastor of Grace Lutheran Church, in Vero Beach, FL. The Rev. Joshua Skogen serves as the pastor of Hope Lutheran Church, in Portage, IN.

Even though our Evangelical Lutheran Synod isn't nearly as large as the Wisconsin and Missouri synods, depending on what part of the country you are in, you probably aren't all that far from an ELS church. So if you are planning on going on a vacation, realize that going on a vacation from Utah doesn't mean that you should be going on vacation from attending the Divine Service.

Our synod's website, els.org, has a "church locator" tool that you can use to find the nearest ELS church. So, when you are planning to see a different part of country, check to see if your trip won't also allow you to see, and worship in, a different ELS church. Your doing so will be an encouragement, both to you, and those whom you have opportunity to meet.

No ~~Unity~~ in Disunity

There is no unity in disunity. People who hold opposing views are not in agreement and cannot truly be in agreement unless all minds are changed to accept and believe the same things. There was a large gathering of famous contemporary Christians that took place this summer on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. This gathering, dubbed “Together 2016,” was an attempt to set aside the important differences in beliefs these people have in the name of unity.

There was also another gathering like this that took place in Salt Lake City last Spring, the Parliament of the World's Religions. At this gathering, representatives of the different “faith traditions” of the world came together to discuss areas on which they are agreed and can work together. It should be noted that the declarations of this parliament were definitely much more political than theological.



There is no true unity in these types of gathering. It may appear, from smiling faces, emotional speeches and heartwarming songs, that a wonderful peace is being established by gatherings like these. But the truth is far from it. A false peace, based on the shifting sands of emotion will be on display, instead of a true unity “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone.” (Ephesians 2:20)

True unity is found only in agreement based on God’s Word. Jesus did not say that we should unite because it seems like the right thing to do. He says, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples.” (John 8:31-32)

Holding onto the teachings of the Bible, in faith, is the only way to define true Christian unity. The Bible gives us more instruction about not coming together under false pretenses: “I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive.” (Romans 16:17-18)

Unity gatherings are also scheduled in other places. Before you consider attending or even watching one of these gatherings, be sure you first understand what God says in His Word. Only then will you be able to separate truth from false teachings. When the Apostle Paul and Silas went to Berea, the Bereans listened to them “examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.” (Acts 17:11) We, too, must examine God’s Word and learn what He says to protect the precious gift of faith given to us.

- Rev. Paul Fries, ELS Communications Director



Recently in the presidential campaign both candidates have accused the other of being a bigot. This is one of the worst slurs that can be cast at a person in our society. Christians have been accused of being bigots for a long time. What is a bigot? Merriam-Webster.com defines a bigot as “a person who is obstinately or intolerantly devoted to his or her own opinions or prejudices; especially: one who regards or treats members of a group (as a racial or ethnic group) with hatred and intolerance.” What we see, then, is that bigotry, when applied to the Christian context, involves two things: the first is how one regards different beliefs and the second is how one treats people who hold those beliefs.

The first thing we need to keep in mind when it comes to the teachings of the Christian faith is that they are not human ideas or opinions. They come from God *No prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.* (2 Peter 1:20-21)

God tells us that His Word is the truth. *Your word is truth.* (John 17:17). We are to believe what God tells us in His word and not deviate from it. *Be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go.* (Joshua 1:7).



In regard to the matter of salvation, the Bible reveals that we are all sinners who deserve God's wrath and punishment. *All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.* (Romans 3:23) *For the wages of sin is death...* (Romans 6:23). The only way a person is saved is through the life, death, and resurrection of God's Son, Jesus Christ. Scripture says, *Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.* (Acts 4:12).

The fact that God declares His word to be the truth means that all other belief systems are false. They are human opinion and do not lead to God. Ultimately, they lead people to eternal death. Holding fast to the truths of God's word is not bigotry. We must do so if we are to have any confidence in our relationship with God and have the certain hope of eternal life.

How are we to treat people that do not believe the way we do? The Bible tells us that we are to *love our neighbor as ourselves* (Matthew 22:39). The parable of the Good Samaritan shows us that our neighbor is everyone, not just those who live next to us. To love our neighbor means that we seek what is best for them. The best thing we

can do for our neighbor is share the Gospel with them, so they believe in Christ and are saved.

The Bible forbids us to hate others. *Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness.* (1 John 2:9). This means we are not to speak evil of others or mistreat them in any way. Sadly, because of our sinful nature we find ourselves falling short of the glory of God. Individual Christians may be guilty of bigotry. When such sin is identified the Christian should immediately repent of it, and seek forgiveness from God and the one he has offended. The Christian church does not teach or endorse bigotry of any kind. May the Spirit guide us to love others according to God's will, while holding fast to the truths of His Word.

- Rev. Matthew Luttmann, Grace Lutheran Church, Vero Beach, FL

Let the Children Come

The baseball season is now in full swing, and Facebook pages are scattered with pictures captioned, "Junior's first Twins game!" Those one-year-olds often don't look as thrilled as the parents about the experience. They're frightened by the cheers, the shouting, and the flying food and drinks from exuberant fans. They don't understand what is going on and probably won't remember it, and yet parents see value in taking the children to ball games.

The best family activity is bringing children to the Divine Service. This can be a frightful exercise, not for the kids, but for the parents. The potential for kids' shouting, flying Cheerios and sippy cups, and all the wiggling in the pews makes for anxious times. There certainly are appropriate times to take a noisy child out temporarily to reprimand or offer a moment to cool down. However, with that real need comes the temptation to regularly remove the child from the Divine Service, whether it is to play with toys in the nursery, to send them out to hear Bible stories and color in "children's church," or not to take the children at all.

After all, we don't want to distract other people from their worship, and parents feel that they can get more out of church if they don't have to give half their attention to wrestling Junior.

Contrary to parents' fears and concerns, children, as part of the body of Christ, belong in the Divine Service long before they understand all that is going on. Jesus' words recorded in Luke 18:16, "Let the little children come to me," are evidence enough. Jesus wanted them to come to Him so that He might bless them. Two points are important for us to examine further. The first is God blesses through His Word, and the second is faith receives God's blessing.

First, Jesus blesses children and all in attendance in the Divine Service through His Word. Christ's Word carries the blood-bought blessings of His sacrifice on Calvary. He liberally dispenses the treasury of His heavenly blessings through His Word. He blessed the children by water and the Word through which He brought them

forgiveness of all their sins and entrance into His eternal kingdom. He commanded Peter, “Feed My lambs,” and still today, through the preached and taught word of the pastoral (shepherding) office, Jesus nourishes and feeds His little lambs, blessing them with that same forgiveness and life.



Pastor Webber with some wiggly boys

Second, recognize that faith alone receives these blessings. Rational capacity or attentiveness are not conditions for receiving God’s blessing. When Jesus commanded the disciples to let the parents bring their children to Him in Luke’s Gospel, it says that the parents were bringing specifically their infants (βρέφη) to Him. Jesus didn’t require them to have certain rational capabilities or to stop wiggling first. But Jesus held those wiggly, noisy children and blessed them. And blessed they were, for Christ gives His heavenly blessings and faith alone receives it.

Luther contends that children are better candidates for faith than adults because they lack reason, “for reason is diametrically opposed to faith” (AE, Vol. 68, p. 22). Since children can have the gift of faith, St. Paul could say of Timothy, “from infancy, you have known the Holy Scripture, which are able to make you wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 3:15). Christ’s Word is not spoken to children in vain, for His little lambs are part of His flock and they hear His voice.

Bringing children to the Divine Service is more than just giving them an experience that we value and find worthwhile. It is even more than creating in them the vital habit of regular church attendance. It is recognizing that Jesus and His proclaimed Word are for them. By bringing them to the Divine Service, parents bring them to Jesus that there they may be blessed by Him. It’s not easy wrestling, disciplining, and teaching them. Patience wears thin. You don’t get to pay attention as well as you would like. But it is a sacrifice that God commands parents to make, and it is worth it. You are bringing your children to gather with you and the baptized family of God and to sit at the feet of Christ. And there, at Christ’s feet, old and young alike are blessed by the Word that is Spirit and Life (John 6:63). Let the Children Come

- Rev. Joshua Skogen, Hope Lutheran Church, Portage, IN

Parish News

Ladies of Hope

Our Ladies' Group made several decisions at their September meeting:

1. We will be starting a food pantry (non-perishable) both for members of Hope and also to give to charities/people who contact the church asking for help.
2. Please save box tops and other applicable labels and bring them with you to church (There will be a box put out for them). We can donate them to Prince of Peace's school to help with their fund-raising.
3. The next meeting will be at 10:30am on October 1st. If you are a lady of Hope (Lutheran Church) please join us.

Special Events

September

- 10 – Men's Bible Study, 9am
- 11 – Family Movie Night, *Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch & the Wardrobe*
Pizza served at 5:30pm,
Movie starts at 6pm
- 23-24 – Youth Group Getaway



October

- 1 – Ladies Bible Study, 9am
Ladies of Hope, 10:30am
- 8 – Men's Bible Study, 9am
- 9 – October Golf Outing, time & location TBD
- 16 – Youth Group, Miniature Golf, time TBD
- 23 – Movie Night, *Luther*
Pizza served 6:30pm, Movie 7pm
- 30 – WELS/ELS Reformation Service,
Time and Location TBD

