

“CHURCH IS SOMETHING YOU ARE, NOT WHERE YOU GO: WHY THE SYNOD??”

Lenten Thursday 3

Peace Lutheran
Grass Valley, CA

March 12, 2015

Colossians 4: 7 - 18
I Corinthians 3: 5 - 16
Luke 9: 1 – 6

Teaching Points from the Message

1. Synod means “on the road together”, another expression of teamwork.
2. Paul and Jesus were “team” players.
3. Synod is “us”: a multifaceted, multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-generational diverse and yet highly integrated system.
4. Synod helps us to remember that we are not an island. We are a team joined to the heart of God for implications in the Kingdom.

The Message:

These Wednesdays we’ve been considering how Jesus names us into Church—something that we are, not where we go or what we do.

In some ways, our topic today is very similar to what we talked about last week -- teamwork. Only this week, we’re talking about a bigger picture. We’re talking about the church team that includes the idea of Synod, the larger denominational team that is gathered for ministry.

You may recall that the word “Synod” means on the road together. It has the implication of many on the same road to reach the common goal. It is about the mob of believers who join hands to do the work of the kingdom and find that together there is more power and influence than any one unit (congregation) has on its own.

I’m going to start with a sports team image, again. The two teams were on the field. One could tell, just by watching the warm-ups that one team had much more skill than the other. But the other team, the one with less skill, had what is sometimes called “heart”. They had enthusiasm, a sense of fun, leadership, vision and desire. The contrasts were obvious. What was surprising was that in the end the team with “heart” won big over the more skilled and talented players.

In this case the key to winning the game, like it is in many cases, the key was “heart”, the key was teamwork. The key was each part of the team working well with the other parts for the good of the whole; to do what no one team member could do on its own or by itself.

This is how it could be in the church, all working together to build the kingdom. And in doing so, we can win big for the kingdom.

Paul, the great missionary of the New Testament, was a team player. He names some of the members of his team in the letter to the Colossians. He names the people that help him have the heart of a missionary to reach out for the sack of the Gospel, even in “chains”. Paul specifically names Tychicus and Onesimus whom Paul used as couriers. There was Aristarchus, Mark and Justus who stood by Paul and encouraged him. There was Luke who later documented in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles. And Epaphras who was a prayer warrior. Paul knew the value of these partners in ministry and the power of God in their hearts for the building of the kingdom of God, for the working together of peoples and communities of faith along the road together.

As a team player, Paul knew that different people functioned to help build the kingdom. In I Corinthians, Paul speaks of building the foundation. Paul speaks of the need for a variety of folks to be involved in bringing the fruit. Some plant, some water, some are able to reap the harvest.

Jesus too, gave power and authority to the team. Jesus needed others to do His work. And Jesus promised that this kind of teamwork would bear fruit.

This same teamwork, even the kind of teamwork I talked about last week is at work in our local, community and larger statewide and worldwide ministry and mission. In fact, the unity of communities of faith is a key foundation of our work together for the kingdom. We all need to be in the game.

You see, when it comes to “synod” and denomination we’re talking about working together for the sake of the Kingdom. As I said, “synod”, as “on the road together”, has to do with teamwork. It has to do with our partnership for the sake of God’s kingdom in our world.

I know that pretty often synod is used to mean “they”. Let me say tonight that Synod is us. They synod is all of us, and all the believers of our partner communities of faith bound together for support, encouragement, multiplication of efforts, for the good of the Kingdom. Synod is us. Church is who we are. Synod is who we are. Synod is every disciple in every congregation in this Sierra Pacific area that calls itself ELCA. It is God’s people bound together, on the road together, to do together what God calls us to do, to do those ministries and missions that are harder, if not impossible to do alone. Synod is what helps us to be “team players” in the larger arenas of the Kingdom.

The synod is a multifaceted, multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-generational diverse and yet highly integrated system of all kinds of people called and bound together to extend the kingdom at home and around the world.

Let me just say that the work we do in the world as “synod” is beyond description. It involved the operation and support of seminaries, colleges, universities, and medical/long-term care/rehabilitation facilities. It is involved in the training and support of missionaries, deaconesses and lay outreach ministers. It has to do with training and support of Pastors and the call process. It is involved in working for justice and peace in the world, for helping the hungry and the disenfranchised. It has to do with touching street people and apartment dwellers and those who have never ever been exposed to the love of Jesus Christ. It supports chaplains and ministers in the military, in government and in secular hospitals and on Christian and secular campuses. It involves the support and encouragement of congregational ministries. In many areas of our country, maybe even here, Lutherans through the work of the Synod, personally touch more lives in a given day than any other agency.

Synod is about joining together with a heart for God to win big in the world. Is the church always the most skilled? Probably not. Does the church always have resources to tackle big problems? No!! Is the church always in the best position to deal with tragedy, disaster, hurt or pain? Hardly.

But we are together with the heart of God to play our part. We are journeying together with a common goal — the extending of the Kingdom. We are people of heart--the heart of God. And God’s heart can win the world.

Synod helps us to remember that we are not an island. It reminds us we need to be in partnership, recognizing that there are those who are doing what we can’t do and that we have the opportunity to be partners by our support and encouragement. This partnership helps us see that the little parts we play have big implications somewhere else in the world.

Synod is US! Church is who we ARE! Synod is the partnership we share for mission and ministry in the larger picture of our world.

Amen.