

This morning's sermon has been prepared for us by National Bishop Susan Johnson. Yesterday afternoon, Bishop Susan Johnson presided and Bishop Pryse preached at our concluding worship service with the approximately 400 delegates and visitors who have gathered in Toronto, Ontario to participate in the Synod Assembly. Bishop Johnson writes:

Grace to you and peace in the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. I am so delighted to be here with you in this way today, and I bring you greetings 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. We gather to worship today in a variety of different settings – in congregations and specialized ministry settings, and together as a synod in convention. We continue to look at our convention theme – *Together for the love of the world* – and we celebrate the examples of Peter and Paul.

One of the hymns I love to sing is There is a Balm in Gilead. It contains a verse that goes something like this: If you cannot preach like Peter, if you cannot pray like Paul, you can tell the love of Jesus and say he died for all. I love this verse! It lifts up and honours the saints that have gone before us – giants of the faith! – Peter and Paul. It acknowledges the enormous contribution they have made in growing the church. But at the same time, it reminds us that we too have a part to play in continuing to grow the church, in continuing to reach out in mission – *Together for the love of the world*.

There is a temptation that we always face to look back at the good old days of our faith community. For many of us it is thinking about the sixties and seventies when we

were doing lots of church planting. Or 1986 and the beginning of our national church when there was a much larger staff and more resources. Or we look back to the early church, to those who had actually had the privilege of first hand encounters with Jesus and who saw rapid growth and the spread of the new faith. Maybe for you it is looking back to a time when your congregation was fuller or you had a larger Sunday School. This looking back to the good old days is a very human trait. Nostalgia is not always a bad thing. But if our nostalgia blinds us to current realities or paralyzes us from taking action then it needs to be nipped in the bud.

As I have gone across the church for all 5 synod conventions I have had the opportunity to meet with several young pastors. And one thing I heard repeatedly was “We don’t understand this talk of the good old days when there were more people and resources in the church. This is the church we have grown up in.” We can alienate new leaders and new members of our church if we only look backward. Instead our focus needs to be on what God is calling us to now?

It’s also important for us to remember that these pillars of the new church, Peter and Paul, were human and flawed, not superheroes. Peter denied Christ three times. Paul persecuted Christians. And yet God called and used them to build God’s church. In the Gospel encounter we see today between Jesus and Peter, we hear Jesus asking Peter three times – do you love me? Jesus gives Peter the chance to hit the “undo” button. To take away his guilt for denying Jesus three times and instead to declare his love. Each time, more and more impatiently Peter protests his love, and in response each time Jesus responds with a single request. Feed my sheep.

Feed my sheep. It is a wonderful three world summation of our call to mission *Together for the love of the world*. It's about caring for the needs of the others whom God loves. Physical needs and spiritual needs. And most importantly is it directed outwards, into the world God loves so very much. Jesus does not say – Peter, take care of yourself. Jesus does not say – Peter, look after your own kind. Jesus charges Peter, and us, with the care of all of the sheep.

It's a huge task! In our communities and around the world we see so many people in need of feeding of many kinds. It can feel overwhelming. It can frighten us, paralyze us, and drive us back to nostalgia for the good old days. But we are not called to this task alone – we have partners for this ministry. Congregations, working together in areas, with a synod within a national church. With ecumenical partners and within world-wide communions. We can take courage from the support and example of millions of people around the world, answering God's call to feed my sheep, *Together for the love of the world*.

Feed my sheep. That's what we do when we work to build right relationships with Indigenous Peoples.

Feed my sheep. That's what we do when we do ministry to end homelessness and provide affordable housing.

Feed my sheep. That's what we do in partnership with Canadian Lutheran World Relief and the Lutheran World Federation as we take care of two million refugees every day.

Feed my sheep. That's what we do when we grow in Spiritual Renewal, deepening our faith and equipping ourselves for discipleship as we pray, read, worship, study, serve, give and tell.

Feed my sheep. That's what we do when we pray for peace in the Holy Land and work to support the struggling Christian community there.

Feed my sheep. That's what we do when we strive to protect the earth by calling for responsible resource extraction or participate in Fast for the Climate.

Feed my sheep. That's what we are doing today as we gather in worship to be strengthened in community and equipped for service where we live and work and play.

Feed my sheep. Three simple words. One huge task. But what a privilege to be inspired by the witness of those who have gone before us, including Peter and Paul. What a privilege to work with partners locally and around the world to accomplish this task. What a privilege that God continues to call us, flawed and gifted human beings to be part of God's mission to love and save the world. Let us have the courage to look forward, using the resources that we have, to answer God's call – *Together for the love of the world*. Amen.