

“Joy:fully Lutheran”

This is the theme of our Synod’s Convention, which will be held this month in Tampa, Florida. As our newly re-elected President, the Reverend Dr. Matt Harrison, writes in his report to the Synod:

“How Can We Speak of Joy? Our LCMS convention will take place in another year of temporal turmoil in our nation and the world. National politics is unendingly rancorous and crude. Soundbite slander is the rule of the day. Antagonism toward Christianity continues to rise. The vilest forms of religion (like Satanism) are on the ascent.

“Christianity in the U.S. is on the decline. The Catholic Church is embroiled in scandals that shake its foundations and smear other denominations with anti-Christian sentiment and bigotry. The nation is deeply divided. There is no need to mention well known international challenges, which often affect our partners around the world, harass our missionaries, and (in the case of militant Islam) threaten their safety. How can we speak of joy?”

It's true, our challenges are many. Within the next fifteen years (due to retirements, deaths, etc.), the number of active pastors in our Synod is expected to drop from 6,000 to 3,000. Church attendance has already and obviously been affected by countless distractions and increasing apathy. We are seeing what Jesus foretold, “And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold” (Matthew 24:12). We are experiencing what He said to the church in Ephesus, “But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first” (Revelation 2:4).

BUT! There is no reason for us to be surprised, nor to despair at our situation. For the Holy Spirit has not abandoned His Church. He is where He has promised to be: present in the Word and Sacraments. For, “through the Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, the holy Spirit is given [John 20:22]. He works faith, when and where it pleases God [John 3:8], in those who hear the good news that God justifies those who believe that they are received into grace for Christ’s sake” (Augsburg Confession V).

The forgiveness of sins has not become ‘irrelevant,’ nor has it disappeared. God’s rich gift is still living and active among us, and with it, the promise of everlasting life. And, until the Day when that everlasting life becomes our present and permanent reality, we have Jesus’ own promise, “And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20).

These may not be the “happiest” of days for us as the people of God. We may face hardships—some subtly seeing to undermine our faith, some making bold and open attacks upon who we are and what we believe. Nevertheless, we are still filled with joy and peace in Jesus Christ. He will see us through this day, and every day, until He comes again.

To further quote President Harrison:

“Jesus is the key to joy. Jesus is our source of joy. Jesus is our anchor of hope. Jesus is our consolation in the face of Satan and his fury! Jesus is our joy! When I advocate being ‘Joy:fully Lutheran,’ I’m not saying there’s not joy (eternal life) outside orthodox Lutheranism. There is salvation and joy wherever Jesus’ Word of free forgiveness through cross and resurrection is present and believed. I’m not on some hyper-orthodox kick to question the Lutheranism of some. I am advocating that we revisit Luther’s Small Catechism, albeit, with joy in mind. I am convinced that orthodox Lutheranism is the best thing going! Why? It’s the clearest and most comforting refuge for sinners there is. It’s all about Jesus.”

So let us be “all about Jesus.” Join us, won’t you, in His gifts, His mission, and His joy!