

SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST JULY 19, 2020

Pastor Dawn Nelson, Lord of All, Strathmore, AB

ISAIAH 44:7-8

WHAT ABOUT?

Grace mercy and peace from the One God, that created us, holds the plan for us, calls us into life, and shepherds us each step of our journey. Now may the words of my mouth and the meditation of each heart be acceptable in the sight of our God, our strength and our redeemer, AMEN.

I want to start by saying thank you this morning, because in all the work that is being done to keep the devotions and sermons going... I have been taking time to do some reading to keep my mind growing and challenged, and it has really been a joy to do that. Sometimes those things don't happen when a church is active and busy, so this has been really a good time of renewal for me.

That being said, I want to share a bit from an article I read this week, called

“IF YOUR CHURCH FELL OFF THE MAP TOMORROW WOULD ANYONE NOTICE?” that really made me stop and reflect... Would they?

The main message of the article reflects the message from Isaiah 44 that was read this morning, about how is the world going to know about God, if there is no one sharing the story.

The first priority, as I, as a shepherd of a flock I love, see it, begins with growing the congregation into an engaged and healthy unit, or perhaps a better term is team. I am not sure if you have ever considered the church as a team, but we truly are. A team of many different players, each of have different roles. Some are the goal tenders, who preserve the focus and teachings of the church. Who in faith keep us focussed towards the goals of God before us. Some of us are the

forwards who move the church literally forward, step by step in living and serving and being. And some of us are the defense that work to defend the foundations or traditions of the team. Now I am not a great sports fan, I enjoy an occasional football or hockey game, or curling... but I do appreciate what it means to be a team and to function together within the tenants of the sport. The hard work and the practice and learning and growing in abilities.

The celebration of success. To see the church growing, and children learning, and people growing a team spirit, along with God. If we are to go out and make a difference in sharing the story and the promise and the joy of Christ for the world to experience, it starts with building the foundation and health of our greatest resource. And that, my friends, is all of you. And all you do. And how you live and speak and serve and share, in Christ's name, in all the world! So I love to watch or to hear of how your congregation, and the NALC and the Christian church on earth is growing and engaging, in preparing to tell the world

The second part comes down to helping people who have never heard the gospel, to discover and learn about Jesus. To proclaim for them, who Christ is, what a difference having him in our lives is, in ways they too can see and want for themselves. And then to help them see the future blessings, both immediate, but also into eternity.

Have you ever had the experience of trying to teach a child something new, and when they get it, or accomplish the goal, when they see for themselves what is possible, they light up with excitement and joy and anticipation of what is next. That is what being the church that Christ calls us to, is all about. And in that time of discovery, when people suddenly recognize or see for themselves in a way that fills their own personal needs or provides comfort, the joy of what they experience, that is one of the greatest experiences ever.

But a big piece of that is sorting how to help people get there. I discovered long ago that feeding people in a church setting is a very fine tuned practice that we

constantly have to focus on. Jesus said “When I was hungry you fed me”, and we take that advice to heart. If someone comes to you and they are really hungry, it is far more effective to feed them the hot dog, get to have the hotdog, and then to pray with thanks for the meal and the other blessings. If we pray first, their hunger may hold them back from recognizing who the giver is.

So often, when people come to our doors, be it here, or in the community, they come with a need or a concern. If their experience with how we respond to their request is positive, it will open the door for them to come to understand how it is, or what it is that Christ, through the church, does, and wants to do. So we become the first line, and first impressions are so important.

And in that way, as Isaiah calls us to, we can help to tell people what has, and what can happen in the days to come... First off in a personal way, for many, and to follow, in a spiritual way.

And the third part of the equation for the people of Christ, is to mobilize our congregations to impact the broader community. The church is much more than a small community process. If you remember, when we joined the NALC, part of our decision making was that we wanted and needed to be a part of a denomination that was attuned to and involved in the world. That upheld the standards of Christianity and Lutheranism, beyond our walls, or even the borders of our country, and gave us a way to carry God’s word out our doors into many places. NALC, with its four Core Values, has given us opportunity to mobilize in mission while remaining faithful to our traditions, having voice and input as congregations, and in all things, remaining focussed on Christ who calls us to be who we are. The final line of this morning’s words from Isaiah remind us that Christ is our Rock or our foundation, there is no other. In who we are as congregations, and as members of the North American Lutheran Church, we are mobilized in many ways, to carry that foundation of Christ, and Christ alone, to share the strength that gives us forward in so many ways.

This morning's message is being shared at 4 NALC churches. St. Peter's in Stettler, Peace Lutheran in Claresholm, Living Faith Lutheran in Red Deer. I want to tell you that, because it is important and exciting to know that this journey is one that we make together, to impact the communities around us. And it helps us know we have the support and companionship of others. Sometimes we may feel as congregations, like small little groups, and we may wonder what little old us can do. But together, we can do so much!!

So back to that first question for a minute, IF OUR CHURCH FELL OFF THE MAP TOMORROW WOULD ANYONE NOTICE? I believe the answer is ***absolutely***, because we have discovered through this morning's lesson, but also through reflection, that there are many that do know us, and would notice, and miss us. There are each of us that gather either virtually or in person to worship, and would miss what it means to us. Just think how you have missed your time in the church together on Sunday mornings... There are also many whose lives we cross, in so many ways each day, that have come to know us as neighbors, as friends, as resources, as partners in faith. And they would miss the place we hold in their groups and communities and life. And certainly our presence and connections in the Canada District of NALC, but also in the US and in other places that we participate in missions, in learning, in impacting the world, would miss our involvement and sharing.

Isaiah's words are as important and relevant today for us, as they were to the Israelites long ago as they grew in faith and followed their God. May we continue to respond to Isaiah's words and calling to the faithful, and keep the foundation of the ONE Cornerstone of our church, Jesus Christ our Lord, central and glorified in the world now and for the ages to come.

YES, WE WOULD BE MISSED, THANKS BE TO GOD... AMEN