



First of the Month @ CLC

April 1, 2022

Dear Christ Lutheran Church,

The world is changing.

But I don't have to tell you that. We have lived through so many changes these past couple of years. Who would have thought back in January 2020 that we would learn to live with facemasks, that something called "Zoom" would be a common communication occurrence, that gas prices would near \$6 a gallon, that we would be facing our 22nd year in a severe drought, and that long-standing sports franchises (i.e., MLB's Cleveland team and NFL's Washington team) would change their names?

Finally, it seems, that two years after COVID interrupted our lives, things are returning to "normal." But maybe not. I try to pay attention to what social scientists say about culture, and here's the consensus: the changes we've lived through won't go away, and in fact, are a part of our new normal. COVID may never be "cured;" it may morph into new variants (hopefully our medical and scientific community will help minimize its effect). Or, there may be a new virus altogether which alters life. The political divide we've been living through will likely not go away, either. The rift between right and left will affect nearly every area of our lives. Global warming will change the way we people (especially in the western states) will live. Digital and social media is not only the dominant platform for public and private communication, but will advance in ways we can't even begin to imagine (or at least, I'm not able to imagine; younger minds might have a greater ability).

So, it seems a natural conclusion that the Christian Church is changing, too. Those who study the trends tell us that we are rapidly moving from a "Christendom" model, where the Church had a valued voice, to a "post-modern" model, where the Church is not only disregarded, but considered irrelevant. In other words, we are venturing into unknown territory.

Some of the staff at CLC have been reading *Canoeing the Mountains* by Fuller Seminary professor, Tod Bolsinger. Bolsinger's premise is that, just as Lewis and Clark had to find new ways to explore the western continental divide, so also the Christian Church needs to find new ways of being the Church. Lewis and Clark were tasked by President Thomas Jefferson with finding a water route from the Missouri River to the Pacific Ocean. Outfitted with

able frontiersmen and fortified canoes, imagine their surprise when they reached the headwaters of the Missouri River only to discover the range of mountains that lay before them. Their previous experience, and the provisions they brought (i.e., canoes) were not going to work for them now. They had to reorient themselves for a new way to travel (i.e., by foot and dependent on Native American guides) in order to eventually succeed at their quest.

Tod Bolsinger suggests we in the Church are like Lewis and Clark as they discovered that what got them there was not going to get them where they wanted to go.

What does that mean for us? Simply, we need to change. What got us where we are as the church today will not get us to where we want the church to be in the future. We believe that the message of Jesus Christ – his death and resurrection, his grace and forgiveness, his teachings and wisdom, his gift of salvation – is not just good for the life to come, but incredibly important for life now. And we believe that every single person living would find greater purpose, deeper peace, healthier life, and steadier hope with a relationship with Jesus. We want this for everyone.

Right? I mean, is that what we really want? If it is, and I hope to God it is, then there are two implications to embrace. The first is, we will need to value the past but not try to resurrect it. As a Lutheran church we have a deep and meaningful history. How can we keep the core of who we are while, at the same time, stretch the boundaries of what we do? The vast majority of those currently not attending a church care very little about "Lutheran heritage." It seems to me a lot of the "packaging" of what we do can change while still holding the "gift" of what we believe and what we value. Bolsinger suggests that a church in a "post-modern" age needs to be creative, innovative, and risky in trying ways to connect people to the God we believe in.

The first implication identified above largely depends on staff and leadership who plan and coordinate worship and ministry. The second implication, however, rests largely on the shoulders of everyone who calls CLC their church home. In an article by Luther Seminary professors Dwight Zscheile and Michael Chan (*Faithfulness in a Time of Collapse*), it is suggested that navigating the journey into an unknown future will require faithful people replicating their faith in others. The authors write...

Many congregations have significant numbers of members who are functionally there for primarily social and cultural reasons...However, they often struggle to identify God's movement in their daily lives, talk about God, pray or read the Bible on their own, and share their faith with their neighbors. The way they express their faith isn't readily transferable to others – including their own children and grandchildren.

Ouch. But here's the reality; since we have returned to on campus worship after the COVID shut-down, we average less than five first-time visitors a month. Invitations to worship have been rare.

So, charting the future and "canoeing the mountains" will require new resolve, new behaviors, and a new focus. And I believe we can do it. Christ Lutheran Church has already been willing to innovate in order to reach out to others. From worship styles, to worship settings, to programs, to events, to outreach, we have done things other churches have been slow to adopt. But we have far to go. As an aging congregation, we will need to embrace the challenge of being a church that grows "younger." The commitment to welcoming and embracing teens, young adults, and young families is critical.

I am hopeful our folks take advantage of the Good Friday/Easter invitation cards that will be available beginning this Sunday. Both Good Friday and Easter Sunday are times when friends, family, and neighbors consider attending a worship service. To accommodate greater numbers and to provide safety to those concerned, worship at both 6:30 and 8:00 am on Easter will be outdoors (weather permitting); dress warm. There may be no greater time to celebrate the goodness of God, and the depths at which God has gone to demonstrate God's love for us.

Other events to be aware of is the unveiling of a new and special art piece in the foyer. This will take place on Palm Sunday, April 10, at 9:05. And listen for an invitation how you might purchase your own smaller copy of the art piece for your own home. Also, know that our church administrator, Kurt Salierno, has put together a kitchen committee to update the Community Connection Center kitchen. Watch for much needed changes to take place there that will help our kitchen serve the needs of our church for a variety of future food-related functions.

As I am bound to say in worship after giving the announcements for the day, “Pray for your church and where God may be leading you to participate in the ministry we share together.” May the God of our ministry inspire us and embolden us to “canoe the mountains” toward a future of God’s design, and may we be found faithful and active in following wherever God leads.

Peace,

Pastor Brian Malison

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