

Erika Nilsen
December 1,2,5
Consecration Week – First Lutheran Church, Aitkin

Dear friends in Christ, in bring you grace and peace from our Lord and Savior Jesus. Amen

How wonderful it is to be with you today – how good it feels to be back in your midst – how right it feels to join forces with Pastor Darrell again! Thank you for inviting me to be here this morning - to be a part of what God is up to in your hearts and lives and in the life of First Lutheran Church.

It seems terribly odd to think that almost 12 years have passed since I served as a pastor here at First Lutheran. And while the dark circles under my eyes and the new creases and worry lines on my face are indications that time has passed – I feel as if it was just yesterday that we were in ministry together. And I guess in some ways – it was just yesterday – because that is the marvelous thing about God's church – that we have always been in ministry together – because we are members of the big body of Christ – we are part of the same family – brothers and sisters – united in faith – across time and miles to all of God's people. How great is that!

So, when I knew I would be coming to preach here today on consecration Sunday – I did a very strange thing – I started looking back through the funeral sermons I had preached while I was here. I was looking for a particular sermon I had written – and I sadly cannot remember who it was for. But looking back over those sermons certainly reminded me in spades of who you were and who you continue to be as a congregation.

First - I realized that I did a lot of funerals for people who were not connected to First Lutheran – and I found myself utterly grateful for what has also been at the heart of this place – which was a call and a mission to care for this community and to be – quite literally be the presence of Christ in its midst. From Baptisms to weddings and funerals and everything in between – you have always known that you did not exist just for you – but that God put you here for the sake of world around you. MORE?

Secondly – though I never found the sermon – I couldn't get over the memory of one of your loved ones who had the uncanny need and ability to use, and reuse and repurpose anything and everything. A product of the depression and world war 2 mentality – this woman was recycling and reusing long before it was popular to do so - and why I remember this I do not know – but she even found a purpose for old men's underwear – after they were sufficiently worn out – I don't care to know how long that took or how she decided – but at some point – she cut the elastic band off the top of them – and used that elastic band for other projects – like holding the lids on her tupperware – or binding a bunch of papers together.

Now that's resourceful.

But maybe even more than just resourceful – or purposeful out of necessity – maybe long before today – she understood this rather churchy word we have been throwing around today – this word Consecration. Maybe she knew deep in her bones what it meant that she, as well as what she had been given, were consecrated – meaning – set apart for a special purpose – greater than one can imagine – a holy purpose.

This is Consecration Celebration weekend – and I think it's a very fair question to say, “What does that mean?” In fact it's a good Lutheran question – one of Luther's favorites

What does consecration mean? What are we getting at today?

Here's a simple definition . . . "To consecrate something is to formally set it apart for special use."

From the Hebrew and Greek words it goes even deeper to mean – made sacred – to be made holy – for a divine purpose!

Ok that makes sense – that's why we call this consecration celebration because you will be setting aside a portion of your income – for the church – for mission and ministry in and through First Lutheran and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

But I would venture to say and am willing to proclaim that today is about a whole lot more than your money.

I absolutely love the season of Advent and in part because we get to hear the humble beginning of Jesus' story – and we heard just a portion of that story this morning. And what we hear about Mary and learn from those divine messengers is that our very lives are consecrated – our very lives are set apart for special use – our very lives are made holy – for divine purpose – by God's grace and activity in us.

Think about Mary for a just a moment - humble, young, scared Mary – a girl of 13 years of age and to this one – God comes and says, "Greetings favored one. The Lord is with you" Wow – what kind of a greeting is that? You can imagine why she was stunned and maybe afraid –But then the messenger goes on to say, "You have found favor with God." Think about that simply line for just a moment. Don't we all long to hear those words? Don't we all long to know that God regards us with value and with worth?

I believe that those words are not just for Mary – but indeed God speaks them to each and every one of us. Greeting favored ones" - that's You!! That's you.

But then the messenger goes on to say – "And now you will conceive in your womb and you will bear a child and you will name him Jesus."

Mary's life has just been consecrated – made holy – set apart for a special purpose – for divine use – by God's grace and holy spirit activity in her.

Mary will bear the Christ child – God in the flesh – Emmanuel – into the world – that is her purpose – that is her calling – that is what she has been set apart to do.

And humbly, I'm sure with much trepidation and some anxiety she first asks how this could be and then accepts what is and says, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord, let it be with me according to your word."

My friends, I have good news for you today. When baptismal waters were splashed over your heads – when you first came to be in this world – God's Holy Spirit took up residency in your life and guess what – you were consecrated – by God's grace and holy spirit activity in you – you have been set apart and made holy and placed on this earth and in this church and in this community for divine purpose. And that's not just your money – that ALL of you – every last bit!!

You have set apart – like Mary – to bear the Christ child into the world – to bring forth the light of Christ into dark places – to fill a room, a home, a heart with the very love of God. You have been made holy and God in you is coming to bear!

Now – with Mary – you might be wondering if this really is good news. You might be saying "How can this be?" You see you have maybe been convinced along with much of the world that your life is really just your own – that you are the king or queen of your castle and that what you have is by your

own hand and what you need is more of it. Or you have maybe been convinced like much of this world that what you do have to offer is not of much value anyway.

I imagine Mary thought all of those things – first “this will ruin my life.” And “secondly – why me Lord I’m just a young girl.”

Yet – somehow – she was able to say Yes and in fact – maybe she simply realized that she had no choice – It was who she was – consecrated – made holy – by God’s activity in her - for a divine purpose.

Friends, hear this as good news – You have been consecrated by God – filled with the holy spirit for a purpose – set apart for holy work. You see, this is what God does and has been doing from the beginning.

Greetings favored ones –

I believe God speaks those words to each and every one of you everyday . . .

Greetings favored one –

I believe God speaks those words to First Lutheran church TODAY

You see - God has looked upon you with favor and you will bear a child – You will bear the Christ child. You First Lutheran church – will bear the Christ child to this world –

This world that sometimes seems consumed with darkness

This world that sometimes seems overwhelmed with greed

This world that clings to power over peace

And rightness over relationships

Into this world – you will bear the Christ child – through the Holy Spirit at work in you.

As Martin Luther preached – we are called not to be of the world – but FOR the world.

Here you are, servants of the Lord. Let it be with you according to God’s word.

And so may our good and gracious Lord Jesus, whose love in humble service bore the weight of human need and who upon the cross forsaken worked your mercy’s perfect deed – may this good and gracious Lord move in you again today – that you, his servants might bring to worship, not a voice alone, but heart and consecrate to God’s purpose – every gift which God imparts.

