

Pastor Jordan Gades Sermon 8.18.19 Genesis 1:1-5

So it's been an incredibly exciting week here at FLC.VBS this Week went Great had its ups and downs, broken arm, power outage, but we also learned that whether life is Unfair, Scary, Sad, or is full of changes; and of course life is Good, GOD IS GOOD! As you heard at the beginning of the service our Call Committee and Council have kicked it into high gear and done a great job in interviewing and going into deep conversation and discernment about our potential candidate for Senior Pastor. Again those dates are this Thursday at 7pm for the meet and Greet and next Sunday August 25th right after the service will be the vote. Please plan on attending both of those if you can! It's important to the entire congregation that we get as many people as possible together for these decisions! And I can tell you as one of the people who was doing more than one of those people who were a part of more than one of those made it especially busy.

But something else happened this last week that we don't hear too often. The ELCA made national headlines. If you want to refer to that pink hand out in your bulletin, we'll go through why. The ELCA had its triannual church wide assembly this year and its worth going over what happened there. I want to make sure you know what's going on so you can talk to people about it!

- Presiding Bishop Eaton reelected - that's great because first time ever that it's been done on the first ballot. We are a united church and Eaton has done a pretty good job representing all of us.
- Racism still exists and it is rampant in our society as a whole. We as a church are trying to fight it.
- "Sanctuary Church Body" - Back later
- Standing up against violence
- Emanuel 9 - Charleston church shooting - white supremacist killed 9 people in a southern Baptist church
- We want to work together with other Christian denominations, not new, and enter into productive conversations with other faiths
- This is going to blow your mind, the ELCA is massively overwhelmingly White. We want to feel open and inclusive for all people
- We affirmed that we should care for immigrants and refugees Faith Sexism and Justice - huge resolution which I would encourage you to read - Stop treating people like there aren't people, stop treating acting women and girls like the lesser, they aren't, make this stand wherever you can.
- Deacon Sue Rothmeyer is church wide secretary- great news
- Deacons now ordained - ELCA has made some changes to the deacons in the last few years and this kind of caps it, acknowledging that God has called these people to a life of Word and service and in that they should be recognized on the same as the ministers of word and sacrament, Pastors
- 50 years of women ordination, only 50 years and it's still, today, a huge uphill battle for so many of these amazing women.

These are all amazing examples of our church taking a stand for justice and shining a light on many issues that we don't think about or really take a stand on very often. We don't think like that very often. We hear about acts of racism and mass shootings and acts of serious violence and we are stuck with the place of fear and not knowing what to do. We are stuck. What can we do? Well our church is doing something and I would like to spend a little time clearing up what we they are doing.

With labeling the ELCA a Sanctuary church body we are standing up and for what we believe as Christians.

First off Sanctuary - This is a pretty loaded word. When we start talking about sanctuary and churches I know my mind jumped to that older Disney film Hunch back of Notre Dame. The main character comes running into the church, fleeing from the city guards yelling sanctuary, sanctuary! And the priest stands up to the guards as says you can't take her this is holy ground and you can't take her! And I feel like society kinda has this idea in their head of this is what the "biblical understanding of sanctuary is? Standing up to legal authorities and hiding "criminals" and that's not it? Sanctuary cities are defined a couple of times in the bible but as places people who accidentally kill another person can go to hide because revenge was a lawful practice.

But when we start to unpack the idea of what sanctuary is as a part of our faith it's not about hiding the guilty it's about freeing people in different ways.

Sanctuary of a church

Sanctuary - place of peace and harmony

Sanctuary - place where you can lay down your burdens and rest

Sanctuary - a place where you can be fed and not have to worry about what happens next.

How do we already offer sanctuary as a church as First Lutheran of Aitkin - this sanctuary is one? We come together to be freed of our burdens every week, to put down our problems at the feet of God and know that they are taken up by him. We are fed both physically and spiritually. We come here to find peace and live in a community for even just a little bit as God intends us to.

People from outside of our congregation come to this church to find sanctuary. We feed people all the time. We have community meals where this place can be a real sanctuary for these people. A place where they no longer are in want an hour. Where they have meal to eat with friends. Where they can be at peace.

And even when it's not a meal time people come in seeking sanctuary. And they receive it. I've met strangers and heard these stories and offered them help. Because it's what I'm called to do. Our office staff gives out food baskets. When someone asks for food the first question that gets asked of them isn't do you have a job, when's the last time you've had drugs or alcohol? We don't ask if they are a citizen. No it's how many people will you be needing food for. It's that simple. We give peace. We become that sanctuary for however long we can to everyone we can.

And why do we do this? Because the bible tells me so.

Deut 10:19 And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt.

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.” – Hebrews 13:2

“I will be swift to bear witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired workers in their wages, the widow and the orphan, against those who thrust aside the alien, and do not fear me, says the Lord of hosts.” – Malachi 3:5

“The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.” – Leviticus 19:34

We are called to do this. Every single one of us. There are no exceptions. This is what God clearly states. Repeatedly. Take care of your neighbor. And your neighbor is every single person around you.

When we frame sanctuary like that we begin a new conversation about sanctuary.

Now I'm going to say this in regards to the second part of the Church wide memorial. "Church Body". ELCA Church wide has almost no control over what congregations actively do. We are a congregation led church. that is why our church wide assembly was filled with people from the churches of the ELCA. So when the ELCA says that we are a Sanctuary church body they are saying almost nothing but they are also saying everything. Everything. We already hold all these things as truth as a part of our faith dating back thousands of years. It's time to reclaim them now. It's time to say there is injustice. It's time to say we need to treat other human beings like we want to be treated as human beings, as Gods beloved children. There is no gap or jump in that statement for our faith.

THE ELCA is not making you or even asking you to break the law, but rather take care of your sister and brothers in Christ. Feed people, give them a roof to sleep under, a place to feel human, a place where they can be at peace and know they are seen and loved. That's all and that's everything. That's all we want for our lives and for each other's lives. That's what God wants for us. Amen.