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We Have An Amazing Lord

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Texts: Mark 16:4-8; 2 Corinthians 4:1-7; Isaiah 40:6-11

In this afternoon's Gospel

Three women, two Marys, and Salome,
come to the place
where they buried Jesus.

The very large stone was rolled back!
A young man sitting, dressed
in a white robe,
said to them:
You seek Jesus of Nazareth
who was crucified.
He is not here,
He has risen!
And they were *amazed*.

This is the Easter Story:
We have An Amazing Lord!

We have an Amazing Lord.
Not only on Easter Sunday
but also through the whole History of Salvation.
Edmund Steimle
the noted Lutheran radio preacher, has suggested:
Imagine yourself in God's Place.
back in the days of Genesis,

You created a fine new world.
 You peopled it with splendid little creatures
 made in your own image.
 You wrote into their hearts
 a longing to know you,
 the God who had made them.
 You gave them the sense of right and wrong.
 You gave them the freedom to choose.
 The very thing that can make you truly human.
 Then soon you found these marvellous creatures
 at each other's throats,
 hoarding and wasting the bounties of nature
 as the mood struck them.
 Would you not have lost patience
 and simply let them scramble?!
 You might.

But We have An Amazing Lord!

So He whispered into the hearts
 of men like Abraham, Moses & Elijah
 and of women like Sarah, Miriam and Ruth.
 He recalled them to the God
 who had made them.
 In those Old Testament days a few of them listened
 to those men and women of God.
 But many ignored, scoffed or cursed them
 or told them to go mind their own business.
 You probably would have given them up then and there!
But We Have An Amazing Lord!

God said: I shall live among them:
 show my face,
 share their life, their troubles,
 their struggles,
 even their death if necessary.
 Surely if they can see me and touch me
 they will listen to me,
 and live in peace and joy with each other.

So God stepped in—
 in the person of Jesus Christ.
 These little creatures listened for awhile.

But soon they grew ugly,
spit at him and killed him.
Surely had you or I been God
that would have been the last straw.
But We Have An Amazing Lord.

God said: Now I will rise from the grave.
I will show myself alive to them.
No more should death terrorize them.
No more should they forget me.
No more should they doubt my love for them.
So God, in the person of Jesus Christ,
rose up from the grave.
I wonder whether you and I would have bothered.
But We Have An Amazing Lord.

Fifty days after Easter,
on the day of Pentecost,
when they were all together in one place:
Suddenly a sound came
like the rush of a mighty wind;
tongues of fire rested on each one of them.
And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit.
The onlookers were amazed!
Because We Have An Amazing Lord!

We recognize this Amazing Lord
Not only in salvation history
but also in our history.

Fifty Years of Lutheran Convergence
is Norman Threinen's book¹ on
the Ups and Downs
of Lutheran merger in Canada.

The Downs loomed large.

Sixty three years ago was a real Thumbs Down.
A layman called Stuermer
stimulated a merger movement.

He tried to consolidate the Lutherans in Western Canada,
and to hold a convention where only laity could vote.

But this merger movement was short-lived.
Its opponents stopped it in 6 months!

For fifty years. 1922-1972. there were more Downs.
Countless committees and commissions,
countless papers and consultations,
labored for Lutheran merger in Canada.

There was the three-way J.C.I.L.R.,
the Joint Commission on Inter-Lutheran Relationships
laid to rest in the fall of 1977.

Then in the fall of 1978
was born the Lutheran Merger Commission.
It, too, had its Ups and Downs.
I recall recessing one noon hour
with an impasse so "impassible",
It seemed like "Commission Impossible".

But all through the Downs there were persistent Ups.

Thirty one years ago, for example,
in an article in the *Canada Lutheran*,²
Dr. Norman Berner expressed the dream
of many East and West.

In his dream he saw himself
being elected a delegate
to a great gathering of Lutherans
to plan a single Lutheran Church in Canada.

He wrote:

"In my dream
I see the consecration of the Archbishop
of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Canada".

Thirty one years later here we are;
here, too, is Norman Berner
an elected delegate
at this Constituting Convention.
He was close on our Church's name;
He may get his archbishop some day.

Five years after Norm Berner's dream,
Twenty six years ago. 1959.
Dr. Ulrich Leupold presented his paper

“The Doctrine of the Church”

at a merger conversation.

In typical Leupold fashion he said:

Ultimately unity is found

not in human statements

but in Christ.

Now Dr. Leupold was never naive.

He knew the value of constitutions and statements.

They help us, as today’s scripture lesson says,

“to renounce disgraceful and underhanded ways”,

and “to make open statements of the truth”.

And the Truth is

We have this miracle of Merger

this miracle of Trust

Because We Have An Amazing Lord.

This Amazing Lord Amazed His People.

Our Gospel lesson says:

“And they were amazed”

“and they went out and fled from the tomb

trembling and astonished

and they said nothing to anyone,

for they were afraid.”

The young man in the white robe says:

Don’t be just amazed;

Become amazing!

Go tell his disciples and Peter.

Go back to Galilee.

Back to your congregation.

Back to your church.

We Have An Amazing Lord,

Therefore We Are His Amazing People

In our congregation

In our church.

The one most singularly significant happening among merger commissioners these seven years has been the growth of a sense of community. Today’s Old Testament lesson

pictures *the church* as
 the flock of the tender Shepherd
 gathering the lambs in His arms
 carrying them in His bosom
 and gently leading grown ups.

We call our Church
 The Body of Christ
 the community of believers.
 A genuine community
 into which we can fit;
 with freedom to find our identity
 as a son or daughter of God;
 with freedom to find our intimacy
 as a brother or sister in Christ.
 Where we are members one of another.
 Where we bear one another's burdens.
 Where we share one another's joys.

Tom Skinner says:

"The reason I need the fellowship of Christ's people
 is because I have clay feet right up to my neck.
 Sometimes I get lonely.
 Sometimes my mind gets messed up.
 Sometimes my feelings get up tight.
 I fall down occasionally.
 I need some brothers and sisters
 who will throw their arms around me
 when I get frustrated and fatigued."

Dr. Jaroslov Pelikan says:

"When I get up in the morning
 I cannot always believe all of the Creeds.
 But I find strength in knowing
 I belong to a community of faith
 which does believe."

But none of us is so naive as to think
 that everything is always sunshine and roses
 in our Christian community.

One of Flip Wilson's routines
has to do with a Black Preacher
preparing to pass the offering plate.

Flip would intone:

Now Brothers and Sisters
if this church is gonna progress,
it got to *crawl*.

Congregation: Let it crawl, Rev., let it crawl.

Flip: And after this church has crawled
it got to stand up and walk.

Congregation: Make it walk, Rev., make it walk.

Flip: And after this church has walked it's got to run!

Congregation: Make it run, Rev., make it run.

Flip: And for this church to run
it's gonna take MONEY!

Congregation: Let it crawl, Rev., let it crawl!

Many challenges face the new ELCIC.

Money is certainly one of them.

Our New ELCIC

Will not be all sunshine and roses.

People will smile with you and sometimes frown.

People will sing with you and sometimes weep.

People will rub elbows with you

sometimes the right

and sometimes the wrong way.

People will share with you their faith and doubt.

People will encourage you and sometimes discourage you.

But our crucial challenge is in

BECOMING:

Becoming what we already are in God's eyes:

The flock of the Great Shepherd

The Body of Christ

The Community of Believers

The People of God.

In Becoming the People of God.

our Epistle reminds us,

we preach, not ourselves
 but Jesus Christ as Lord,
 with ourselves as servants.
 "See how these Christians love one another"
 was the amazing thing about the early Christians.

We Have An Amazing Lord

We Are His Amazing People
 in our Church
 but also in our *World*.

In our Old Testament lesson, Isaiah says:

Get you up to a high mountain
 Herald of good tidings
 Lift up your voice with strength
 Herald of good tidings
 Lift it up
 Say to the world
 Behold your God.

ELCIC, Herald of Good Tidings
 Through Canadian Missions
 Through World Missions
 Through the World Council of Churches
 Through Lutheran World Federation
 Through Colleges and Seminaries

Lift up your voice with Strength:

Proclaim to every people, tongue and nation
 That God, in whom they live and move, is love.
 Tell how he stooped to save his lost creation
 and died on earth that we might live above.
 Publish glad tidings, tidings of peace,
 Tidings of Jesus, redemption and release.

ELCIC, Herald of Good Tidings, Be Good News
 Through Canadian Lutheran World Relief
 Through World Hunger Appeal
 Through Church and Society
 Feed the flocks like a Shepherd

gather the lambs in your arms
carry them in your bosom.

The sixteen million refugees,
the hopeless and helpless,
the bleeding and starving
in this world.

Not only through food and clothes,
not only through "Band Aid" help,
but also through help to improve
their style and standard of life,
their quantity and quality of life.

To care for them
not only in God's mercy,
but also in God's justice.

We have no mission but to serve
In full obedience to our Lord,
To care for all, without reserve,
And spread his liberating Word.

ELCIC, Herald of Good Tidings,

Lift up your voice.

Say to the world:

You Have An Amazing Lord!

You Are His Amazing People!

So shall the Church at last be one,
So shall God's will on earth be done,
New lamps be lit, new tasks begun.
Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia! Amen.

Notes

- ¹ Norman J. Threinen, *Fifty Years of Lutheran Convergence: The Canadian Case-Study*, Lutheran Historical Conference Publication No. 3 (Dubuque: Wm. C. Brown, 1983).
- ² Norman Berner, "The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Canada", *The Canada Lutheran*. July-August 1954, 3.