

Grace and peace are your, dear friends, from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; Amen!

Today we celebrate the 60th Anniversary of life-together as Christ Lutheran Church in community-together with Greensboro North Carolina. The celebration, reflection, and hope for tomorrow lies not in what we have accomplished, but rather in what God has done through us for the sake of our community.

When we celebrate all that God has done for us through Jesus Christ, we also understand [through faith] that Christ came not for Himself, but for *our* sake and the sake of all people created by God. To expand on this message in the context of Holy Scripture and an anniversary celebration, consider our gospel text dear friends.

In the gospel narrative, Jesus is in the synagogue in his hometown of Nazareth. As He is teaching, an attendant in the synagogue hands Jesus the scroll of the prophet Isaiah... and Jesus reads. The magnitude of this event is as powerful as the creation of Heaven and Earth my friends. The reality of this event documented, witnessed, and recorded is a message that will lift you up to a new joy, hope, and peace. The very essence of this event is the revelation of God’s love, faithfulness, and eternal protection for the very people (you and me) that He poured His Holy Spirit into!

Why is Jesus reading from Isaiah so special, significant, and enduring? When we ask our Lord, ‘why’; God will provide! When Jesus reads the words of Isaiah; He is in fact speaking HIS very own words that God gave to the Prophet Isaiah 700 years earlier! Our Lord now delivers the same words spoken by God’s servant to God’s people in person. God takes full responsibility for speaking to us in His voice, in His person, and in His time!

And, the Words that Jesus speaks, of all the possible words from Isaiah is to declare the year of the Lord’s favor. God no longer speaks through the prophet for people to dispute, question, or debate or even to wait any longer for; now, God appears to us as one of us to speak to us and to fulfill the promise given first to Israel. God himself in the person of Jesus Christ hereby declares the year of the Lord favor to all people.

Those who have ears, let them hear says the Lord. Hear what the Spirit of God is speaking today, here and now my friends and hear the same Word that was declared by our Lord when HE released the captives; when HE restored the sight of the blind; when HE lifted us up by descending to us.

Jesus reads from Isaiah and declares the fulfillment of the prophecy. Now hear the closing words to the 61st Chapter of Isaiah; “I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my whole being shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations.”¹

Our gracious and generous God has indeed made us holy and has granted us the faith, wisdom, and understanding to accept the fulfillment of the promise of His Word. He has granted us the gift of faith and understanding so we can continue to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor to all who have not yet heard. We are given the gifts of the Spirit to open the eyes, free the captives, release the prisoners, not through works of our own, but through the same living Body of Christ we are all members of.

We do this in faith my friends, towards one another, towards the neighbor, and even those we do not yet know. We do this by lifting others up in the same manner that God lifted us up; by a leap of faith that takes us to a place

¹ Isaiah 61:10-11 (NSRV)

where the poor reside, the hungry wait, and the tired gather. God lifts us up and calls each of us to humble ourselves for the sake of our neighbor. This is how sight is restored, hope is revealed, and the promises are fulfilled.

We are indeed holy and we will indeed lift up our neighbors by meeting them where they are. As our congregation gives thanks for the milestone of 60 years of service in the name of our Lord, we also remember those who have recently celebrated their final service together at Community Lutheran Church. And we will meet them where they are in their sorrow, their loss, and their concern by welcoming them, not only in person alone, but celebrating and incorporating the traditions and heritage of their history into our very identity for the sake of a new beginning for all of us; One Body in Christ.

The next 60 years of Christ Lutheran Church is not about any individual, it *is* about us and ‘our relationship’ with one another for the sake of life-together in community. It is about us going into the trenches and sitting next to the homeless, the hungry, the abandoned, the marginalized, the people who are rejected from our world and declaring the year of the Lord’s favor and grace to them! My very dear friends in Christ, if we do not embrace the work of our Lord in sharing the Good News, and truth of God’s Word with the people of Greensboro; who will? God has called you and me [through the faith we have been granted as a gift] to be the example, the witness, and the voice of the very Word of God today: here and now. Why? Because the lives of people depend upon and wait for the message we have heard, understood and accepted!

It is about faith, witness, and life-together! It is about lifting up our neighbor in the name of our Lord so they too can be sent to lift others up! This is how God has chosen to work: first to the Jew and then the Gentile! We are all God’s precious gift, but the message of what God is doing in the world **MUST** be spread through the clay jars; through the vessels that had the miracle of ‘water turned to wine’! We are the miracle that cannot be silenced, stopped, halted, or ignored. We are the Body of Christ that will bring the Good News to a new generation for the sake of life-together in Greensboro NC, from Christ Lutheran Church and faithful others who will proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ!

What I share with you today is the truth of Holy Scripture! We do not need to wait for another sign, person, or message because our Lord has spoken! My friends in Christ, there are but one truth and one Holy Word of God that will remain forever. Whether we accept it today or tomorrow, it is one truth that God alone has given us for the sake of taking care of each other...**IN HIS NAME!** You, as the Body of Christ will raise others up to a new life, a new happiness, and a new reality that God is Lord, and the year of favor has been proclaimed!!!!

We have the Spirit of God, the sign of the dove that will bring you home; we have the gifts of the Spirit to raise our neighbors, friends, and strangers up to a new place in community with one another; We have the Word of God to provide us the confidence, the authority, and the strength to proclaim the Year of the Lord’s favor. When we accept and participate in the tasks our Lord places before us, then others will see their Lord (not us) through renewed faith, sight, hope, and life. They will see the love and grace of God that sustains us for life.

You have and will lift up countless people today and tomorrow in the name of the Lord, because the Word of the Lord has proclaimed it!! You have lifted up GPD, GFS, and countless others for the sake of a relationship with our Lord that we are not controlling, but a relationship that **GOD** is guiding, managing, and leading home to Him! This is our Lord’s world, not ours; this is our Lord’s design not ours, This is God’s plan and we are participating with all the faith we have been granted for the sake of life; abundant life.

700 years after God gives Isaiah His word to proclaim to the people, Christ comes to speak His own words in a time and place where people were waiting to be lifted up. As we embark together on another 60 years of service, how low will (or can) we go to meet people that are still waiting to be lifted up? Who will we sit next to for a while, where will we meet them, and when will we proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor to free them to experience the peace that passes all understanding to keep our hearts and minds through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.