

Tuesday Reflection for February 16, 2021

Welcoming and Partnering Together!

1 Corinthians 1:10

Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of one Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose.

This week I am writing, and we are expecting an ice storm. I never thought I would say, wish it would be snow! While I am not a fan of snow, ice is troublesome for everyone. I am waiting, not so patiently, for spring to arrive. Tomorrow we begin the season of Lent, a time for each of us to reflect on our relationships with God, with each other, with those in the community, and everyone we meet. As we recall or prepare for baptism, we are tasked to live out our life as Christians.

As you are aware, I have been talking about the future directions for Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). Week one, we looked at our relationships with God, last week we looked at how we nurture relationships within our community of faith, and this week, we look outside the doors of our buildings.

The third goal is a strong presence in the community. The first objective is twofold, one to open our doors to welcome the stranger and the other, is to go beyond our doors to share the love of Jesus Christ. Most of us believe that our congregations are welcoming. For the most part this is certainly true, when someone comes in for worship or another ministry, we greet them, share names, introduce them to others, and encourage them to return. This objective becomes more difficult if the person does not look, act or dress like us. That challenges us because it pushes us out of our comfort zone. And yet, we are called to welcome everyone to our community of faith.

The second objective is to create and nurture partnerships within the community to make a positive impact on the strength of the community. We are meeting this objective in many ways through our work with local food banks, the Bethlehem emergency shelter, and the Hispanic Center. We are also members of Power Lehigh Valley which is an interfaith group working to make our community more just for every single person. Together we have formed a social justice committee which is learning about and addressing social justice issues in our community.

During the season of Lent, we will host midweek worship and discussion on Wednesday nights from 7 pm to around 8 pm. We will begin on Wednesday, February 24th when we will worship and explore what God requires for justice. On the following weeks we will discuss creation justice, religious justice, economic justice, and racial justice. There will be a guest speaker joining us beginning on March 3rd. I am looking forward to healthy discussions on justice issues.

Overall, I believe that the ELCA is encouraging us to look at the vitality of our entire community of faith. As we work together, how can we strengthen our relationships with God, each other, and the community? If we closed all our buildings and left would our community miss us? Would people in Bethlehem and beyond notice a void? I wholeheartedly believe they would. I also believe there is more

work for us to do. The more we address each of these goals and objectives, the stronger we become as individual Christians and as an extended community of faith. During the season of Lent, may we all recall our baptisms and the call that God has extended to each of us. The rite for affirmation of baptism in Evangelical Lutheran Worship, page 236 reminds us that we are to:

Live among God's faithful people,

To hear the word of God and share in the Lord's Supper,

To proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed,

To serve all people, following the example of Jesus,

And to strive for justice and peace in all the earth.

God has given us this call and strengthens us through Jesus Christ to live in this way. It is our high honor to do it. Stay safe, wear your masks, get your vaccines and if you must shovel be careful! Stay home and avoid the ice too!

In Peace,

Pastor Suzanne