

Grace and peace to you in the name of our risen lord Jesus.



The past few days I've been at the Rocky Mountain Synod Assembly, along with our voting members, Brendt and Karla Lux.

The Assembly is the annual convention of this region of the church, where we do the business of the synod – voting on synod leaders and the annual budget and passing resolutions for our life together.

But even more, the Assembly is a celebration of our life together – a chance to share stories of ministry around the territory of the synod.

The theme this year was Life in Christ.

We heard stories of how Christ is present in our lives though our lived vocations of work, family, friends, and church.

The theme was rooted in scripture verses from the letters of Paul, who often explored themes of baptism and life in Christ in his writing.

In the letter to the Romans Paul wrote:

*Do you not know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we were buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life.*

And in the letter to the Galatians:

*it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

One of the highlights of the assembly was a series of interviews with church members about their life in Christ.

Pastor Nate Preisinger, who records a regular podcast with his congregation members about their life of faith, interviewed three church members about how they live out their vocations as mental health counselor, hospital chaplain, and college student.

He asked each the questions – when were you baptized?

How do you live out the call God placed on your life in your baptism?

We also heard stories from outdoor ministries,  
and blessed the new directors of Rainbow Trail and Sky Ranch camps.  
We heard about a discernment process at Urban Servant Corps in Denver  
which has led them to begin work with formerly incarcerated women –  
offering a space to live in intentional community and explore vocation  
as they adjust to life outside of prison.  
Together, the assembly created an art project reflecting our life together in Christ.  
We worshiped and attended workshops –  
and in all of it we explored -  
What does it mean to walk in newness of life?  
What does it mean to say “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me?”



The book of Acts is a whole story that explores how the first followers of Christ lived out their new life in Christ.

The story we read from Acts this morning is a good example of what that looks like, especially if we back up just a bit.

Last week we heard the story of Jesus appearing to Paul on the road to Damascus, and turning his life around.

As Paul is traveling and sharing the story and message of Jesus, he has a vision of a man of Macedonia pleading with him and saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.”

So Paul and his companions go to Macedonia, where they meet Lydia, who helps them establish a community of followers.

That is where the story we read today begins.

Paul casts a spirit of divination out of a slave girl, and her masters report him to the authorities for anti-Roman activities.

Paul and Silas are arrested, beaten, and imprisoned.

They are sitting in the innermost cell of the prison, in chains.

And they are praying and singing through the night.

Even in beaten and imprisoned, they live in trust and joy, knowing Jesus is with them and will not forsake them.

Having been baptized into the death of Jesus, they no longer fear death, but walk in the new and abundant life Jesus has given.



Early this week, I was practicing centering prayer in my back yard,  
and my focus word was *trust*.

If you haven't done centering prayer, it is a practice of sitting in silent prayer,  
and when your mind wanders,  
using a focusing word to bring you back into prayer.

If you've known me long, you will not be surprised that my mind,  
when attempting contemplative prayers,  
chatters and wanders a lot.

So Monday morning, I was repeating to myself again and again, "Trust. Trust."  
And my mind thought – do I trust God?

I sat with that for a moment – what does it mean to trust God?

And I realized that I struggle with trusting God –

if trusting God means trusting that God will make things in my life work out  
the way I want or expect them to.

And I reflected a bit ruefully that I'd like to have that trust in God –  
that all my worries and hopes and longings for the future  
would work out the way I want.

But that's not what trusting God means.

That's not what life in Christ looks like.

God isn't a fairy godmother who shows up to make our dreams come true.

Instead, God promises to be with us in our troubles.

God calls us to follow, and promises to give us abundant life,  
filled with purpose in our love of God and God's world.

And I do trust God – imperfectly but surely.

I trust that I am constantly invited by Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit  
to live in Christ.

I trust that, long before I was ordained as a pastor,

God claimed and called me in my baptism

Into a life in Christ which is always new, always blessed, always loved.



And the same is true for all of you.

Life in Christ is an invitation for all the baptized,  
to abide in Christ and live in the abundant life Christ offers.

Each of us is called to live out our life in Christ

in work, in service, in relationships with family and friends.

As we gather in this community of faith to worship and study, pray and sing,  
we explore together what it means to live in newness of life.

We gather to be the Body of Christ in the world,  
to practice what it means to say,  
it is not we who live, but Christ who lives in us.



Have any of you seen the Hulu show Hot Ones, where participants eat hot wings while the show's guest is interviewed –  
the food gets hotter as the interview goes on?

At the end of the Assembly, Bishop Meghan sat down with  
ELCA VP Imran Siddiqui and RMS VP Ray Ferry,  
and they ate hot wings and talked.

There was lots of laughter, as the wings got hotter and the faces redder –  
but their conversation was rich and meaningful

They talked about how our life in Christ calls us into solidarity with our neighbors.  
Ray Ferry named our need to support immigrant communities throughout our synod  
during this time of increased ICE action and racial profiling.

They talked about our call to stand alongside our transgender siblings,  
who are facing increasing prejudice  
from people citing Christian values.

Then Imran Siddiqui said – given what we as Lutherans know about grace,  
and how we are freed to live abundant lives in Christ,  
how can we share this good news more fully and freely –  
not for the sake of our own numbers or income,  
but for the sake of all who need to hear that they are beloved?

That call is at the core of our life in Christ – to share the good news of God's grace  
loudly and widely in a hurting world.

Thanks be to God, who calls us into communities of faith  
to live out our abundant life in Christ.

Thanks be to God, who calls us in our baptism to lives filled with purpose –  
filled with the love God has for us,  
and love we share for God and neighbor.

In the name of the risen lord who loves and holds us and gives us life. Amen.