

“BE SALTY...BE AT PEACE...”

Bedford Lutheran Church / VA Synod Video Sermon Series
26 September 2021

Mark 9: 38-50
Bedford Charter Sunday / 18 Pentecost B

Good morning! I bring you greetings from your siblings in Christ in our VA Synod and ELCA. Our denomination says, “We are church together!” In our Virginia Synod we are lifting up the many ways God has been FAITHFUL+BOLD+SERVING and calls us to be and do the same!

(Today, for the sake of those viewing or reading this sermon throughout the Synod, I am preaching this week in Bedford, VA.) *Bedford Lutheran Church after years of prayer and patient persistence and with the inspired and faithful leadership of pastors, deacons and lay leaders – some of whom are not able to share in this celebration – on this day are finally able to proclaim to the world they are an officially chartered congregation in the Virginia Synod, ELCA!*

I am thankful for your faithful lay leaders who serve, not only this congregation, but also in the community, our synod and ELCA. And, for your Pastors and Deacons, *including [NAME your pastors and deacons...] and Pastor Tim Feeser at Bedford*, who are wonderful partners, colleagues and leaders in our church.

Finally, thank you for all the ways you continue to encourage vaccinations and go the extra mile to protect yourselves. And the most vulnerable among you in this pandemic!

Let us pray... *Lord, grant that your word is proclaimed in truth and received with joy! Amen.*

Let’s take a look at the readings for this day. In many ways they are really hard to hear and hard to understand. *“Unquenchable fire; cutting off hands; plucking out eyes (Mark); saving sinners (James); hanging traitors (Esther); being saved from enemies (Psalms) and on and on...*

So... What’s a preacher to do? Well, as always, as good Lutheran interpreters and preachers, we look closer and ask scripture to interpret scripture

The writer of the letter called James declares , *“Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise. Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord.” (James 5:13-14 NRSV)*

The reading from Esther demonstrates a strong woman who uses her power and influence for the sake of those who have been held captive, mistreated and forgotten.

The Psalmist sings, *“We have escaped like a bird from the snare... Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth.” (Psalm 124: 7-8 NRSV)*

And Jesus admonishes his disciples who wanted to point out those who were on the inside from those they decided were on the outside, *“Whoever is not against us is for us...” (Mark 9:40 NRSV)*

And... What does any of this have to do with being the church or celebrating the official formation of a new congregation in our Synod? I want to suggest it all has to do with living in a faithful covenant with God and with one another. Remember, the ELCA says, “We Are Church Together!” We can’t be church by ourselves, or even as a solitary congregation. We need one another to stay on track, to support and care for one another and together to serve and love others.

What are the two great commandments? To love God... and To love others as Christ has loved us. We Are Church Together. We simply can’t do these things alone and from the beginning God formed human community so we can live faithfully and serve those in need.

Can you begin to see how the readings today all support this? Esther is FAITHFUL and BOLD and SERVING those who are suffering. The Psalmist looks to God, not self, for salvation. The passage from James speaks of the benefits of a community in prayer, education, support and service to others – sounds like a congregation, doesn't it? And, finally, Jesus corrects his disciples to see a wider community of those whom God loves. He speaks graphically of the dangers of judging others, unless we are prepared to judge ourselves. We really do need one another...

Dear Synod, these are hard times on so many levels. Every week those of us in the Office of the Bishop hear about members of our Synod sick and dying from COVID-19; of loved communities arguing with one another and their leaders about what if any restrictions to put in place to protect the most vulnerable. We know congregations are concerned about what will follow the pandemic. Will members return? Will there be sufficient resources for ministry and mission? What is next?

But, today, like every time we gather together as church – around the holy Word and Sacraments we are challenged to think about all people as God's people; we are corrected when we get too self-centered or myopically anxious about many things. Jesus reminds us over and over again that we are loved; we are blessed to be a blessing for others; we are forgiven and sent out to serve!

Sounds like church doesn't it? Sounds FAITHFUL + BOLD + SERVING, doesn't it? Sounds holy and right, doesn't it?

I love the way our Gospel passage ends, *"Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another."* (Mark 9:50 NRSV)

It is who we are! It is whose we are! So, dear Synod, (dear Bedford Lutheran Church – on this, your "Charter Sunday,") – Be salty...! Be at Peace!... Serve the Lord!... Thanks be to God!

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen!

Bishop Robert F. Humphrey + Virginia Synod, ELCA