



Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast Synod

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

July 15, 2020

Dear Gulf Coast Leaders,

It was so good to be with you in our Service of Prayer and Reflection yesterday. My letter to you today is that sermon. The complete text is below.

Here also is a [link to the video](#) if you would prefer to watch it.

You are in my prayers this week.

Michael Rinehart, bishop
Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus the crucified Jew, and Palestinian carpenter, who lived briefly, died violently and rose unexpectedly.

Liminal Space

I don't know about you, but my daily routines have been so discombobulated, I don't know if I'm coming or going. My sleep habits have been disrupted. I can no longer rely upon my routine ministry habits. Feels like liminal space. Like Jacob's dream on the border of Israel and Canaan, his ladder on the border of heaven and earth. No longer here, but not yet there. Not even sure what there is going to look like.

This reminds of me of being between calls. When you move to a new house, a new town, a new church, new relationships, new routines. That time in the car driving, between the old and the new. Walking in the door of a new office. It's a place of great danger and great possibility.

Routines get disrupted, but that means we are no longer in a rut. It is a place of becoming.

And what has thrown us all in this liminal space at the same time in history? What has turned our lives, the country, and the whole world upside down? A tiny little microscopic thing called a virus. So small you can't see it with the naked eye, and yet it has changed the world.

Put this in perspective.

- You are 100,000 times bigger than a cell in your body.
- A bacteria is 1/10 of the size of a cell.
- A virus is 1/10 of the size of a bacteria. Even bacteria can catch a virus.

Such explosive power in a tiny package. But that's nothing. An atom is 100 times smaller than a virus, and it packs a wallop. You are ten billion times bigger than an atom. I'm no scientist, but I have heard that if you split that atom into tiny subatomic particles, like protons, neutrons and croutons, it creates a reaction so powerful it can power a country, or level a city.

Mustard Seeds

If Jesus was telling parables today, like those in Matthew 13, I wonder if he might not use atoms or viruses as his examples.

When Jesus was describing the kingdom of God, he used an everyday example of a tiny mustard seed. The kingdom is like this. Look how it grows into something substantial. That's what the reign of God is

like. Like yeast, it grows!

Paul says the gospel is the power of God. He uses the it a dunamis, the word from which we get our word dynamite. The gospel seems small, but it is an explosive power in people's lives and in the world.

Isaiah says God's Word never returns empty. Like water, before it returns to heaven, it waters the earth and brings forth an unmeasurable harvest. It goes out and accomplishes that for which it is purposed.

Never underestimate the power of the gospel.

Death and Resurrection

The power of that gospel is in death and resurrection. Unless that tiny seed falls to the earth and is buried, it cannot possibly grow and bear fruit.

The beauty of liminal space is we die to the old, which means we become open to the new. We are reborn into new routines, new ways of the seeing the world, new life.

- The good news is that you are loved with an everlasting love, more powerful than the grave.
- The good news is that the God who loves you, calls you.
- The good news is that reign of God to which you are called comes in a tiny package, but has explosive power in your life, in others lives, and in the whole world.
- The good news is that God is doing something new, even in the midst of death, God is bringing about new life, in ways that we cannot see yet.

If history is an example, we cannot escape liminal space when it comes.

We can only move through it, trusting in the invincible love of God in Christ, and the unimaginable power of the gospel.

Let us pray...

You have promised dear God, to walk with us. You lead us to green pastures and quiet waters. Even though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we do not fear, for we know that you walk with us, your love sustaining us, and your small, powerful gospel calling us. Give us courage to trust. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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