



Some would say “God’s Work. Our Hands.” Sunday got its start just over a decade ago, when higher-ups in our Evangelical Lutheran Church in America wanted to better honor our wider church’s 25th anniversary celebration. So, they would start setting aside the Sunday after Labor Day to encourage its several thousand congregations to dedicate time in service to their local communities and beyond. And maybe the roots for today is as simple as that.

But some would say you need to go a little further back to the late 1980s, to a convention hall in Columbus, Ohio, where an alphabet soup of Lutherans got together to try to figure out how best to put their faith into practice going forward. So, a bunch of ALCers and LCAers along with some AELCers thrown in for good measure, mixed in their ingredients of preaching and teaching, to be sure, not to mention an a deep appreciation of music, but also developing a reputation that would be known throughout the world as a church that rolled up its sleeves and got to work in taking care of this humanity and earth that God still so loves. Some would say the roots for today go back that far.

Except, others believe you need to go back even further: when a bunch of Germans and Swedes and Norwegians and God only knows what other random combination of Lutherans gradually ventured over to this side of the Atlantic, figuring out a way to put their faith into practice that did not quite satisfy their motherland. Maybe the roots for today goes back to them. Still, others would insist you need to go back to the encapsulation of a stubborn old school German with his emphasis on preaching and teaching, to be sure, not to mention a strong commitment to music, but he also wanted a little something more in putting the all-around faith into practice. So, he hoped to have a conversation with the higher-ups in his church, and instead ignited a Reformation the effects of which still continue not just for a “God’s Work. Our Hands.” motto ELCA that we are a part of, but that his impact continues to reach countless faith communities throughout the world. Some would say the roots for today’s celebration has to go back to our beloved Martin Luther.

However, the true starting point for our “God’s Work. Our Hands.” Sunday goes back to the son of a measly ‘ole carpenter. This somehow holy child, who would grow into a prophetic preacher and teacher, to be sure, but who had this nagging tendency of wanting to put the Gospel material into every day practice, and not just for the synagogue-goers, but for the people who weren’t so sure they were worthy to ever step foot inside. And not only would he reach out to them and the looked-down-upon women and foreigners and children and impoverished and prisoners, he would also insist that they were just as worthy of God’s ultimate work of grace and hope and love and compassion and new life, all brought in the flesh in Jesus Christ for them, too.

The truth is our ultimate purpose behind “God’s Work. Our Hands.” Sunday, and every day, for that matter, is that carpenter’s son, that Son of God, that Love Incarnate in Jesus Christ. And so, today, hundreds of thousands of yellow shirts will fill fellowship halls just like ours, as well as neighborhood parks and food banks and shelters throughout this country. Some of those shirts will have the names of their respective home congregations printed on the back in case any onlookers are at all curious what the heck is going on this afternoon. However, today is not about Divinity Lutheran Church or even the entire Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, no matter how much it has developed the public reputation in outreach ministries as a church that rolls up its sleeves and gets to work.

Instead, today is about the men who make the trek up Lakeside Avenue here in Cleveland, desperately searching for a place to keep them safe and sound for the night or however long it takes, and so they find the largest men's shelter in our state provided by our most beloved Lutheran Metropolitan Ministry. Today is about the people who come up to a church building that was once bursting at the seams with people in the pews on Sunday mornings, but is now overflowing with a different kind of hope for the people who Jesus insisted on caring for in every way imaginable. It's as if the nearby Redeemer Crisis Center is just as holy of a spot as any filled-up sanctuary in all the world. Today is about the people throughout that world who are recipients of school kits and quilts and farming assistance: people we will never meet, but it is just what we do as Lutherans all over this earth in doing whatever we can to tend to this place that God still adores; as Lutheran World Relief pools our most vital resources together to bring God's Work to loving fruition.

So, today is not so much about Divinity Lutheran Church or even the entire Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, but about a carpenter's son, who was the most loving fulfillment of the words we heard from the prophet Isaiah: this God who will come and save us all, not ultimately with vengeance, but with grace and hope, with just enough Gospel material to inspire our hands to put hundreds of kits together, with just enough faith being put into practice to convince the recipients as if they are more than worthy of all the love God still has for them and for the whole world. So, today, and every day, in whatever way you bring God's work to life with your very hands and voices and stories, thanks be to God for all of you, indeed! Amen!