



Just so you know, our mother church, of sorts, of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America had its sixty-some Bishops and Assistants to Bishop and some pastors and lay leaders thrown in for good measure: they all met in Phoenix, Arizona, this past week for our Churchwide Assembly. Just so you know, of our 2.7 million or so members across the country, the overwhelming majority of them had absolutely no idea it was going on. And, for those who did know, many did not care whatsoever that it was going on. Because most insist it is bureaucracy. It is minutia. It is budgets and spreadsheets and

continuing resolutions and elections of officers who we don't know and will never meet. It is some of the most un-enthalling matters of what we do as church. We know it has to be done, but for most of us ELCA Lutherans, our experience with church begins and ends with our home congregation, and our little clusters that we grow attached to over the years: from choirs to Bible studies and other ministry groups. So, if we're truly honest about ourselves as ELCA Lutherans, most would say about the proceedings from this past week, that it perfectly matches with our first reading oddly enough: that it is all "vanity of vanities and a chasing after wind."

However, the problem is that more and more people are wondering the same thing for the church as a whole. That it is all vanity of vanities and a chasing after wind, as more and more have given up on the choirs and the Bible studies and the other ministry groups, not to mention the worships as well. But for the hundreds who gathered in a convention center this past week in Phoenix, although we may not be overly enthused about the proceedings in the main ballroom, we can be rather certain of other conversations that we would all gravitate to that happened in the hallways. Lutherans from Minnesota and South Carolina and Massachusetts and New Mexico and Ohio talking about the days when they needed to setup folding chairs to accommodate all the people who emerged in their home sanctuaries, when people needed to get to the church building an hour ahead of time for a walking distance parking spot and a half-decent pew seat, or when Sunday school rooms were bursting at the seams with children. There seemed to be so much of the most infection enthusiasm over everything church then, all the while more and more now wonder if it is all vanity of vanities and a chasing after wind.

Well, the truth is, we are chasing after wind. We have been following this wind that has been fervently flowing over all the world since the beginning. We have been chasing after this Holy Spirit that has been rushing through all Creation with all the love and hope and grace and compassion imaginable, along with an utter defiance to human comprehension, because no matter how much the statistical trends have changed, God says there is just as much Holy Spirit blowing all over now as there ever has been before. That, evidently, there was just as much Holy Spirit rushing through a convention center in Phoenix this past week, representing the 2.7 million or so of us, as there was in the convention center in Columbus in 1988 when the ELCA came to be, and there were double of us then.

It makes absolutely no sense that the same power that took on sin and death and loss of hope and trepidation over what lies ahead after the cross: the same power of the Holy Spirit then is just as much in full force now. So, come to think of it, we're not chasing after it. The Holy Spirit is chasing opportunities to bring the Gospel to life in us, even if there isn't quite as many of us around, because the Holy Spirit is under the impression that even if there aren't as many filling the parking spots, that

they're still yearning for hope. They're craving a love beyond what the world can give. The Holy Spirit is under the impression that there is a world out there that needs what we have to offer, and that same Holy Spirit is not showing any signs of backing off from firing on all holy cylinders within us.

The Holy Spirit is so fervently flowing that when school kits are put together in a few weeks here, they're going to find their way to children all over the world who wouldn't be able to have them otherwise. The Holy Spirit is so captivated with practicing what we preach that when we see the images of floods tearing entire communities apart, we will unleash our resources into Lutheran Disaster Response who will stay there as long as it possibly takes. The Holy Spirit still has all this new life to unveil, that when men are turned away over and over again in the city of Cleveland, Lutheran Metropolitan Ministry will forever boldly stand not only as a safe haven for them, but as a place of holy empowerment. The Holy Spirit has so much love to share that when a child is bullied at school, that they can find a place at one of our church camps and actually be told in no uncertain terms that they are cherished to their core, and that that Gospel will never change for them.

There's too much Holy Spirit still flowing through this place and all over the world. It didn't stop after Good Friday. It didn't stop when the numbers started trending whatever direction to our dissatisfaction. There's too much Holy Spirit that we cannot handle all it wants to do on our own. So, yes, we need the help of our mother church to maximize the power of this Holy Spirit that is still chasing after all children of God so that they know that the Gospel will always apply to them, even if they aren't so sure about the church anymore. We need the help of Lutheran World Relief and ELCA World Hunger and Lutheran Metropolitan Ministry and our church camps and our colleges and seminaries, because there's too much Holy Spirit flowing around to not maximize the compassionate reach. We may not need as many folding chairs, but we still have more than all we need in that same Holy Spirit that took on all the sin and all the death and all the loss of hope and all the trepidation of what lies ahead. We have more than enough Holy Spirit to sustain us now and for whatever lies ahead, because for some reason beyond human comprehension, Christ is still Risen indeed. And for that Greatest News of all, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen!