

## Sermon Message – August 2, 2009

Grace to you and peace from the God who was and is and is to come. Amen.

God is good. Amen? God is good and as a point of departure for our message this morning, I would just like to thank you. On behalf of our team of twenty youth and 5 adult leaders that recently traveled to New Orleans to participate in the National Youth Gathering of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. I would like to thank you for your support, your prayers, your continued interest in our trip and for all of your kindness in sending our team on its way. As the leader of our group, I would like to say, it was worth the time and energy and your confidence and trust were well-placed. Ours was a team of 20 youth, who will be 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders this coming year at their respective high schools. These were students who did not travel across the country expecting a wild party, but they enter into this experience with respect for the people they would meet, anticipation for what they would learn and experience, and joy for the opportunity to gather together with thousands and thousands of other Lutheran youth for the purpose of mission, ministry and worship together.

When you take a group of kids on an experience that is this big and this overwhelming, you're never really sure how it's going to turn out. You hope that they will focus on the important things, ignore the distractions and keep an ear open to hear the call of God. In those respects, I am proud to inform you Hope Lutheran Church, your youth and leaders honored your investment and engaged in this experience with their whole hearts and minds.

The week or so before we were to depart on our trip, Pastor Roger asked me, "and you'll do a report of your trip during worship the Sunday after you get back?" And with only one appropriate response to give our new Pastor, I said "Of course." He told me that we would also be continuing our sermon series on our Church's Core Values, so I should fit that in, and he let me know what the lectionary reading was for this Sunday as well. So, here we are – but as I said at the beginning, God is good.

Our Core Value for today is: **Our Lutheran Heritage relative to the Present Day.**

- Honestly, I wasn't exactly sure what this meant, but if you will allow me I will suggest that a significant Core Value for the ministry of our church is that "Our Lutheran Heritage IS relevant in the Present Day.

As you heard, our Scripture for today comes from Ephesians 4. "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all."

Allow those voices to echo in your ears...(our Lutheran Heritage is relevant today)...(there is one body and one Spirit)...keep in your mind those words, as we listen together to the stories of God's activity in the hearts and lives of these whom God has called and you have sent. Let's hear what God is doing.

### **Sara Martin**

When I signed up to go to New Orleans, I knew there would be thousands of people. I knew that I would see more people in one day than I have probably seen in my whole life. I knew that 38,000 people was a large number but I didn't realize how big it really was until I walked into the Superdome Wednesday night. Sure I had seen some of the youth groups walking around the city or in our hotel or in the convention center at the same time, but 38,000...well that was hard to believe! On Wednesday night when our group walked into the Superdome we weren't the first or the last, we didn't get front row seats but we saw a lot of people. That night when we sang the first song it was kind of awkward because we didn't know the song real well. But when songs were played that we knew, or grew to know, it was amazing. It felt like everyone in the building, even the people backstage or making sure security was alright, were singing along. It was amazing to see everyone worship in their own way, whether it was standing, sitting, singing, praying or listening to the lyrics. It was unimaginable. Especially when the singers turned off their microphones and it was just the kids and leaders singing. It was also really cool to see people all around the Superdome wearing the In-N-Out hats we brought or doing the dance Arty showed us earlier in the week. It was also really cool to see groups of kids going to or coming back from servant projects all over the city. Like some of the shirts said, we were doing God's work with our hands. It was so hard to imagine that most all the people at the event were Lutherans who wanted to help the city of New Orleans in God's name. Doing what God wanted him/her to do no matter what the project was. Whether listening, building, painting, cleaning, it was all planned for us to do by God. We were Christ's body for that one week, and we will continue to be throughout the rest of our lives, no matter where we are. We are still going to worship Christ with one body.

### **Kai Howard**

While in new Orleans I felt that the EICA was making a difference. We learned a lot about the culture. From food, to music, and even mardi gras. The people of New Orleans were gracious enough to tell us of their lives there and how Katrina had affected them. A lot of them it was hard for, but they pulled together and are still doing so with the help of groups.

The music of New Orleans was very surreal to me; seeing jazz bands around the French Quarter was incredible. This was a superb experience to see musicians doing their work.

We learned about Mardi Gras for our service project. They told us about the hype that has been put behind Mardi Gras as a party holiday, but it is a time for families and friends to eat meat before Lent, and to celebrate. We feel as a group that it is important to clear up the Hollywood spread ideas of New Orleans and Mardi Gras, with the knowledge we have gained during our trip.

For my spiritual impact was not directly to me but seeing how God made people grow in their spirituality. I feel I have a strong relationship with God and this trip strengthened it. I have a stronger feeling that God is in control and that by worrying I can't do anything, but if I get help from him with the big stuff I can get through even the hardest events. Worshiping with 37,000 people was an interesting experience for me because I have never done it before. I felt that the groups that we had after the superdome services and final 15 were important to tie everything together. Without it everything we learned from the gathering would have probably been swept

away in a week, but being able to reflect in depth at the work God was doing made this trip all the more important.

### **Samantha Contreras**

Hi my name is Sammie and my trip to New Orleans turned out to be an amazing experience. I learned so much about the history, culture and the people of New Orleans. On Monday we attended a swamp tour. Our driver who took us there had an incredible story about the tragic event of Hurricane Katrina. He's a 75 years old man who built a beautiful house for his wife. They come back after Katrina hit and it was completely swept away. You ask him what makes him stay in New Orleans and he says I love it here. If you ask anyone why they come back after Katrina and they would all say because they love it. Its home. Everyone there was joyful and happy. It was very cool to see all the people so full of life even if they still had so many struggles to sort out. It was very hard for me to hear people's stories and see the damage that still remains in New Orleans, but the people there are staying strong and have hope. But I not only learned a lot about the people in New Orleans, but a lot about myself as well. Before this trip, I was struggling with self confidence. I always said negative things about the way I looked. I always said I wasn't good enough. And I always put myself down. I wasn't happy with myself and I didn't love myself. My best friend Jackie wanted me to look in the mirror and say "I'm beautiful." And I couldn't. But on Thursday night in the superdome there was a speaker named Viola Vaughn. She said something that stuck out to me. She said, "You must love yourself before others can love you." I really took that saying in. I was so discouraged of myself that I didn't let other people get to know the real me. Slowly I started to break out of my shell and really get to know my youth group. I discovered that I wasn't the only one going through this issue. I discovered that all of us in our own special way are beautiful. Through them I discovered a lot of great things about myself that I didn't see. And now I can truly say I am a beautiful child of God. I am thankful and appreciate so much more now through the people in New Orleans, the speakers in the superdome and everyone in youth group. This is something I will never forget and I'm really glad I got to spend it with the people who went. I love all you guys!

Didn't I tell you? God is good.

So, why are you Lutheran? Do you ever have people ask you that question? Have you ever given an answer more engaging than, my parents were Lutheran... My wife was a Lutheran... I'm German/Norwegian/or whichever other Northern European ethnicity, so I have to be Lutheran.

For our group, being Lutheran gave us the opportunity to participate in a gathering of 37,000 people from across the country. Coming together for worship and service. As part of the gathering, every group did a service project. Our service project was to learn about the culture, history and tradition surrounding the New Orleans celebration of Mardi Gras. If you're like me, at first, this doesn't sound like much of a service project. *In Christ there is one body.* Some people went and put on programs for kids. Some cleaned up parks. Some supported clinics that enabled 1,000s of children to be immunized. Some read to children, some helped to collect and gather over 100,000 books that would be left in New Orleans. *In Christ there is one body.* Some people helped to rebuild homes. Some learned about the environmental impact of pollution on the swamps and bayous that surround the city, we

learned about Mardi Gras. *In Christ there is one body.* You see, when we come across people who are in need, for many of us, our tendency is to figure out the problem and FIX IT! This can be good, but sometimes it isn't what the people need or want.

On the day we went to Mardi Gras World, our servant companion recounted to us a conversation that had just taken place. When asked what he was doing in New Orleans, he told another gentleman that he was helping to lead groups through Mardi Gras world. Surprisingly to me, the other man's response was not "Gee, that doesn't really help us much." Instead, the man said, "Oh good, so many groups come to help us rebuild, but so few of them actually take the time to stop and get to know us. I'm glad your groups will hear about Mardi Gras." Our group, played a tiny roll in the overall ministry of the Youth Gathering, but by doing our part, we were involved in something bigger than we could have ever imagined. *In Christ there is one body.* In fact, this gathering was the largest single volunteer effort in the city of New Orleans since Hurricane Katrina which struck the city nearly 4 years ago. One person reported to us that by their estimates, it would take the social service organizations of New Orleans, approximately 3 years to accomplish what the Gathering Participants accomplished in 3 days.

When thinking about being Lutheran, for some of us, it's easy to get caught up in the Politics and Social Positions that the denomination takes or comments on regarding particular issues. This thinking can easily divide us, but the Lutheran Church (when it works together) is able to make a powerful and profound impact in our communities, our country and the world. Like this Youth gathering, there are times when we "Get it Right!"

Is the Tradition of the Lutheran faith, relevant to your life in the present day? Lutherans have been a people who relentlessly worked so that all people could hear the Word of God proclaimed. Many times we talk about tradition as if it is some kind of monolithic, stationary piece of history that we look back on with a nostalgic glance.

In his day, one of the most shocking and controversial things Martin Luther ever did was to translate the Bible from Latin into German (the language of the people). Since its very beginning, the work of Lutherans has been to speak the Word of God in a way that is contemporary and understandable to everyone.

As Lutherans, we are able to be part of one body and one Spirit to participate together in God's work in the world. Our Lutheran tradition is relevant today, when we speak the Word of God so that people around us can understand who God is and what God cares about. We know that the mission statement of our church is "Extending Hope in Jesus!" (Let's say that together) Do you know the slogan of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America? **God's**

**work. Our hands.** What does God intend to do with your hands? If you don't know, I hope that you'll open your heart in prayer and ask God to speak to you. That's the only way, our Lutheran tradition is going to be relevant today and that's the only way we're going to accomplish our congregation's mission of ... Extending Hope in Jesus. AMEN!