

LWML Sunday 2009

Sermon

NUMBERS AND TITLES IN CAPS REFER TO SLIDES/GRAPHICS

1 MOUNTAIN SCENE -

Today we celebrate Lutheran Women's Missionary League Sunday using the theme from their convention earlier this year in Portland, Oregon:

2 LOGO – 2009 PORTLAND CONVENTION

Look to the Hills...God Reigns!

Ours Scripture texts – 2 of them – move our eyes and lift our senses to hills and mountains. Turn your mind's eye to the Word of the Lord:

Psalm 121:1-2 (NIV) I lift my eyes to the hills—where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.

Isaiah 52:7 (NIV) How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, “Your God Reigns.”

Look to the Hills, God Reigns!

“I will lift my eyes to the hills...” Ps 121 And the message from the hills? “God Reigns.”

3 CLOUDS AND RAIN

God also blesses us with life-giving water-rain too. (Comment on local rain or lack thereof as appropriate) As we receive the blessing of rain, we “praise God from whom all blessings flow,” in creative ways. In the Oregon Convention Center where the LWML met in June, there is a nine-acre roof. A nine-acre roof is pretty big. And the rains that God sends there? Those nine acres of rainfall don't go into the storm drains and into the Willamette River behind the Convention Center. No, they have a Rain Garden that captures those nine acres of rain and waters the grass and shrubs and trees and flowers surrounding the Convention Center. They are “green” there! They are catching on and they are catching rain.

When we receive rain, we should sing “Praise God from whom all blessings flow.” At the convention, Dr. Warren Schumacher suggested that everyone turn their umbrella upside down and catch the blessings while in Portland. And if they didn't have an umbrella, he told them to simply open their hands to catch the blessings that flow down from the gracious creator!

4 DOXOLOGY

(If appropriate in your setting, invite congregation to do what they did at the convention: hold up their hands as if catching blessings and sing the DOXOLOGY)

<p>Praise God from whom all blessings flow, Praise Him all creatures here be low, Praise Him above ye heavenly hosts, Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen!</p>

Our God Reigns – He Reigns on us abundantly!

5 2009 PORTLAND LOGO

The LOGO for the convention directed our eyes to the hills. Look to the Hills, our God Reigns! Upturned faces and upturned, expectant hands receive the bountiful blessings which flow from the King of Kings, the Lord of Lord, Your God Reigns!

Does the majestic word “REIGN” come up in your day-to-day conversation very much? Except for some teenagers who say things like “Hannah Montana reigns” or “the Jonas Brothers reign,” we don’t use the word reign much anymore. We have fewer monarchies in the world today, so the use of the word reign has declined in our daily speech.

Reign is the period of time during which kings and queens exercise their term of office. Reign speaks of being led. Reign normally means someone else in charge. What does it mean, however, to say that “God Reigns?”

Probably we ought to listen to the hearers of the Isaiah 52 passage...What do you think the first hearers of Isaiah’s vision thought when they heard “*How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news...GOD REIGNS*”? It sure didn’t look like it! God Reigns? ...

6 BAGHDAD PICTURE

Here they were – in Babylon – which is modern day Baghdad, Iraq. God’s children were in the Babylonian Captivity, for heaven’s sake ... without a hill or mountain in sight! They were there against their own will, they were in the Babylonian Captivity. They were hostages, they were captives who were forcefully exiled and deported to Babylon. In virtually the hottest and flattest city in the Middle East, the Exiles were trapped.

7 LOGO 2009 PORTLAND CONVENTION

But they remembered what hills looked like as they re-lived their days before being deported from Judah...and Israel.

Can you imagine any good news in their situation – being refugees in a foreign land? Trapped, captives, slaves, incarcerated. It would be awesome good news to know that someone else would soon reign! For Israel this was awesome news. They were in exile, and it seemed that their God has lost his power. Around them they saw the magnificent ceremonies of the gods of the Babylonians.

Do you ever get that helpless feeling? There is so much that happens around us - there are other powers which look much greater and more powerful than we do as the church of Christ. Christians are in the minority. Christians seem to be losing influence. Christians are ridiculed.

8 The “None” Zone

In the Pacific Northwest where the convention was held, participants were told they were visiting the “None Zone.” The most popular religious preference checked off in a survey is NONE.

What is your religious preference? Catholic, Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist, Lutheran, Other? Religious preference? NONE!

NONE – the most popular choice there is NONE – hence it is called the “none zone.” The powerful, false gods, of our time and our society are worshipped there but not in churches. Groups gather in large buildings, but those buildings or stadiums or malls are not churches. Like Babylon, they live in a place where they seemingly are held captive. They need GOOD NEWS.

Can you imagine what it would be like, kept against your own will in the countryside of ancient Babylon? Today, you and I have friends and/or relatives that are serving in the military or civilian service in either Iraq or Afghanistan - and many of us know of their loneliness. I’ve got some good news for you...as impossible as it might seem, OUR GOD REIGNS!

The holy writer says, “*How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news...*” those beautiful feet had to be on mountains over 100 miles away – out of sight...

9 MOUNTAIN SCENE – MT HOOD

Yet their faith’s eye could survey the horizon! They could see those blessed hills! They could here the message “*How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, ‘God Reigns.’*” (Isaiah 52) What a promise, even in the midst of despair. Hope refreshed in a desert of desertion and despair. You get to go home! Our God Reigns! That kind of good news comes from the hills all around you.

10 JESUS PICTURE

In Paul’s letter to the Romans – Paul was talking to people who knew something about politics, power, and reigning monarchs and Caesars. Using the power-word of the convention theme “God Reigns,” Paul speaks right to the heart, where God wishes to reign as your sovereign and Lord. The word “reign” is used four (4) times in the following bible passage – listen for reigning...

Rom 5:17-21 17 For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.

You Reign...with your conquering Savior, Jesus, ladies and gentlemen, you REIGN!

...so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Romans 5: 17-21 NIV)

Grace reigns! The Risen Jesus is now our reigning Lord and Savior.

- If trespasses have been reigning in your life, Your God Reigns!
- If debts have reigning in your life, Your God Reigns!
- If sin has been reigning in your life, Your God Reigns!

In one of the more contemporary translations of the Lord’s Prayer, archaic language gives way to English the way we speak it today in America. Gone are the words “trespasses” and “debts.” Instead, you find the real day to day word: SINS. “Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.” Those words speak of the free gift of victory and good news. “Forgive us our sins....”

The English Book of Common Prayer taught us, as we were growing up to say, “forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” England is a little country. The lots are small and the yards are often fenced. One of the worst things you can do in England is trample over somebody else’s property. NO TRESSPASSING! It is not cool. Repeat after me: “Forgive us our trespasses...”

Up in Scotland, the Presbyterians say “debts” in their translation of the Lord’s Prayer. Maybe Presbyterians you know or some who sing Malotte’s Lord’s Prayer say or sing, “debts.” Repeat after me: “Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.” If somebody is “scotch” he’s known to be thrifty and careful with the penny. Debts aren’t cool among the Scots.

But plain old sin is the translation in the Bible, either in Matthew 6 or Luke 11. “Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us...” The good news is yours. Shouted from the hill tops, how beautiful on the mountains are the feet that bring you that good news. Forgiveness is ours!

11 LOGO – 2009 PORTLAND CONVENTION

See those hills, all decked out in Purple, Gold, and Green? (Refer to logo either on bulletin cover or banner or PowerPoint.) I lift my eyes to the hills...My help comes from the Lord, - look at those mountains, dressed in Gold, Purple and Green

Dressed as...

...Our Golden Creator;

...Our Royal Purple Redeemer;

...Our Green Growth Sanctifier.

The awesome reigning God dresses His creation in golden waves of grain, purple mountain majesty, and the green, green grass of home and health and growing faith. Gold, Purple, and Green – Look to the Hills, God Reigns.

I don’t think I need to ask if you like Gold, but how about Purple? You like it? You wear it? Look around, it’s a sea of Purple! You might wonder, as LWML, Lutheran Women in Mission, Why Purple? I found the reason on the LWML Web site (http://www.lwml.org/about_us/lutheran-women-in-mission-history.htm)

The official colors of the Lutheran Women's Missionary League are purple and gold. According to the Southern Illinois Lutheran Woman’s Quarterly Supplement, October 1948, the Southern Illinois district was the first to adopt the colors of purple, symbolizing royalty, and gold, symbolizing value and integrity. The LWML Executive Board adopted purple and gold at their board meeting held on July 24, 1951, at the Commodore Hotel New York, New York. The minutes of this meeting state: “Motion was made by Mrs. Emil Frank to recommend that the colors Purple and Gold as suggested in the Handbook, be adopted as the official League colors. Action – Adopted.” That was 1951.

Those LWML ladies who dress in purple are following Him who was dressed in purple for us!

12 JESUS DRESSED IN PURPLE AND A CROWN

Jesus was mocked in purple, and crowned with thorns, mocked as royalty.

Mark 15:16-20 16 The soldiers led Jesus away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium) and called together the whole company of soldiers. 17 They put a purple robe on him, then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him. 18 And they began to call out to him, "Hail, king of the Jews!" 19 Again and again they struck him on the head with a staff and spit on him. Falling on their knees, they paid homage to him. 20 And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him. (NIV)

Jesus decided to reign in love and sacrifice and not with might and power. Jesus, mocked in purple, crowned with thorns, reigns! Jesus, mocked in purple and crowned with thorns, gave Himself so that each of us can have the courage to wear purple for the rest of eternity, sons and daughters of the King!

Isaiah 52:7 says it with joy to captives and homesick people: *"How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, "Your God Reigns."*

Whose fleet and beautiful feet bring this message? Who brings good news? Who proclaims peace? Who brings good tidings? Who proclaims salvation? Who says, "God Reigns!"? It's Jesus! How does Jesus bring good news, proclaim peace, bring good tidings, and proclaim salvation?

13 BAPTISM PICTURES

When Jesus Christ rose from the dead, he reigned! He reigned over death, and sin, and became our champion. Ever since, we've been going to the ends of the earth, baptizing and making disciples.

The LWML has followed the leading of the Holy Spirit to help proclaim the saving message of the one with beautiful feet who washes away the sin of the whole world. With Word and Sacrament, with preaching and baptizing, believers have been his hands and feet, proclaiming his unconditional love by word and deed.

Acts 1:8 "...you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

From Jerusalem to Antioch to Rome, to Wittenberg, to Portland, to the Pacific Rim, to (your location)...even to Babylon's Baghdad... Around the world, witnesses of the mighty acts of God, believe it themselves...and can't help but be a league of missionaries.

Good news bubbles up and gets shared. In the book of Acts, in 30 short years, we find recorded 95 people by name in 54 cities, in 32 countries, and 9 Mediterranean Islands. It is said that they turned the world upside down, proclaiming the gift of Jesus.

Repeat after me:

- Good News...
- Peace...
- Good Tidings...
- Salvation...
- God Reigns...

14 COMMUNION PICTURE

All this from a Savior in a purple robe, a crown of thorns, seven words from the cross, and an empty tomb, an empty shelf, and an empty table that today holds the very body and blood of the resurrected one, Jesus.

The closest you'll ever get to Jesus, this side of heaven, is in the miracle of the Word and the Sacrament. In Holy Communion we share the reality of Jesus Christ who proclaims the good news, peace, good tidings, and salvation. He reigns and His royal decree is that we share this feast of the Lord's Supper when we are together in His Name. We can have the courage to wear His purple robe, now a robe of righteousness that he freely grants us in His love. Lydia was one of those 95 names in the book of Acts.

15 LYDIA

The seller of purple, Lydia, with "beautiful feet" encouraged, supported, evangelized, and grew the church. The purple lady – Lydia, reigns as an example of one who came to faith and threw open her home and her heart for the followers of Jesus.

Lydia was a woman ahead of her time. She lived in about A.D. 50 and was a business woman from Thyatira. In her business she sold purple cloth, which at that time, was associated with high social rank and great wealth. Now, dyeing cloth was a lot harder to do in AD 50 than it is now. The purple dye was obtained from the shells of an ocean mollusk. Because it was difficult to produce, the dye and garments of that color were expensive. As a dealer of the purple cloth, Lydia made a fantastic living for herself and her family. She was wealthy and well respected in her community. I can tell you, she not only wore purple, she also had beautiful feet, because she was a good news carrier!

Lydia's story is your story. The book of Acts records: *"On the Sabbath we went in a little way outside the city to a riverbank, where we supposed that some people met for prayer, and we sat down to speak with some women who had come together. One of them was Lydia from Thyatira, a merchant of expensive purple cloth. She was a worshipper of God. As she listened to us, the Lord opened her heart and she accepted what Paul was saying. She was baptized along with other members of her household and she asked us to be her guests. "If you agree that I am faithful to the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my home." And she urged us until we did...Paul and Silas then returned to the home of Lydia, where they met with the believers and encouraged them once more before leaving town."* (Acts 16:13-15, 40, New Living Translation)

So, now we know, too, that Lydia believed in God and she and her entire household worshipped Him. Not only that, she was hospitable and welcomed Paul and Silas into her home.

I love the story of Lydia, a woman with the strength, determination and integrity to be a successful entrepreneur in what was, undoubtedly, an intimidating, male-dominated society. Yet, Lydia was publicly open about her faith and beliefs. She was a strong competent and a successful

person, yet warm and openhearted. She was both a follower of God and a leader...the two go hand-in-hand... Color her purple! Her God Reigns!

16 FIREWORKS

Our God is an awesome God...he reigns from heaven above... In every age, God performs the mighty acts of faith in life and action among us. We are built up, refreshed, and renewed with the sense of awe at God's reign. The problem is, how do you teach an old Lutheran new "awe?" You take them to a fireworks display! There you can't stifle it, especially when the big ones go off. He crowd is moved.

Think about the 4th of July and fireworks...every year it's awesome!

The tingle of the Goosebumps...

The concussion of the big boomers...

The bright star burst of light...

How about you? When you see the first one go off, you say "oohh!" Then a really colorful one goes off and you say "aaah!" But then there's a giant, big orange one and you say "awe!"
Awesome – Oooh! Aaah! Awe!

Our awesome God reigns! Oooh! Aaah! AWE!

Our Fireworks happen here, right here in the heart. The fire of the Holy Spirit is best shared, like those Emmaus Disciples, who on that first Easter Day had a strange warming in the presence of the resurrected Christ. You experience this same "Oooh, Aaah, Awe" in the Sacrament of the Altar.

Luke 21:30 When he was at the table with them, he took break, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him."

Three awesome phrases were shared by these Emmaus disciples...

Luke 21:32 They asked each other, Were not our hearts burning within us, while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"

Look at someone and repeat each of these three phrases...

Were not our hearts burning within us?

While he talked with us on the road?

And opened the Scriptures to us?

17 LOGO 2009 PORTLAND CONVENTION

There, you've done it, you've shared the awe of the resurrection that is experienced every time the Word is spoken, the Bread is broken, the Hearts are awed that God Reigns!

To that we can all say: Amen.

NOTE: The original message has been edited for congregational use.