



Office of the Presiding Bishop
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

2009 Churchwide Assembly Service of Holy Communion

Wednesday, Aug. 19, 2009

Texts: 1 Cor. 12:27—13:13; Luke 9:1-6

Sermon by the Rev. Rafael Malpica Padilla, Executive Director for ELCA Global Mission

Training Camp is over: Let's get on with it!

One of my favorite motivational movies is *Rudy*, the real story of Rudy Ruttiger, a boy from a small steel mill town with big dreams: to play football for the Fighting Irish at Notre Dame. If God would have given me a body frame of six foot five and 230 pounds of lean muscle, my dream job would have been to play middle linebacker for the Pittsburgh Steelers. As you can see God had other plans. Rudy faced many challenges, academically and physically. Because of his persistence and perseverance he made it to the practice squad of the team and rode the practice bench for all but one game. On that final game of his last year at Notre Dame he is asked to dress up. With just a few seconds for the final whistle to blow, Rudy is asked to enter the field. The coach asked him if he was ready, and he replied: "I have been ready all my life!"

The 12 disciples have spent some time shadowing Jesus. They have listened to him and seen him in action. They have witnessed things never imagined: lepers healed, people raised from death, storms calmed down, great debates with the religious leaders, and Jesus teaching with an authority and power never seen before. And here comes Jesus with a challenge to them all: **Training camp is over: Let's get on with it!** Jesus gathered the Twelve, empowered them for mission and sent them out. In that brief encounter their lives are ultimately transformed, even in a more radical way than when Jesus called them for the first time. They had enjoyed the novelty of being disciples of this radical new Rabbi in town. Not only his teachings were different, but he had actions to back it up. Training camp was good. But now it is over, for they had just become apostles. They were given power and authority to go and proclaim God's sovereign rule in the world and to witness to the one who had come in the name of the Lord.

The assignment they receive is threefold: to exorcise demons, to heal, and to proclaim the Kingdom of God. They were called, gathered and sent to share in Jesus' work and mission; a mission to restore community with God and with one another. Jesus' mission is to reveal God's passionate engagement with the world.

Throughout history women and men have received the same call to become followers of Jesus and witnesses of God's love to the world in and through him. God continues to bless the community of the faithful with gifts to "equip people for the task of ministry" and to continue to build up the body of Christ. We can see ourselves being nurtured and developed into faithful disciples. But how can we continue to share in the mission of Jesus and his passionate engagement with the world?

The Apostle Paul and his community reflected on this question in the correspondence to the churches he founded. The community is to rely on the gifts and tools for missionary work. There is one Spirit who equips the community with a multitude of gifts; skills and competencies such as preaching, teaching, service, healing, administration, and the list goes on. In addition to these gifts we are asked to clothe ourselves with the whole armor of God: the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God (Eph. 6:16). We are not used any more to these military images to describe our engagement with the world. For Paul the battle was not "against enemies of blood and flesh" but against the rulers, authorities and "cosmic powers of this present darkness." The world was, and

continues to be, the battlefield where we confront the power of evil and the scandalous realities enslaving and ravaging the human community. The Twelve were called to go out and face these realities in the name of Jesus, and so are we. And out they went: "In the name of Jesus stand up and walk," they said to the lame man at the Beautiful Gate; "In the name of Jesus be healed; in the name of Jesus rise from death; in the name of Jesus you are forgiven; in the name of Jesus your life is restored; in the name of Jesus receive full and plentiful life."

Yes, the apostles were ready. The faithful gathered in the mission congregations developed by Paul were ready, but he told them, "Do not go yet. You may be gifted and you may have the tools for the trade and the dexterity to use them. However, there is something more you need." The Apostle Paul, that wise old fox in missionary service, challenged the disciples of then and of now to have the mind of Jesus, for this is the more excellent way to engage the world in his name. The mind of Jesus that loves the world "to the end," emptying himself on the cross for our salvation; the mind of Jesus who let him "set his face"—as Luke describes it in his Gospel—to go to Jerusalem; the mind of Jesus that allows us to "regard no one from a human point of view" but to see the face of God in her or him; the mind of Jesus that enables us to walk by faith and not by sight.

How do we get this mind of Jesus? It all began in the waters of our Baptism where we renounced the devil, its empty promises, and the powers of this world that rebel against God, were anointed with the gift of the Holy Spirit, and joined in God's mission for the life of the world. Marked with the cross of Christ forever, we were given the mind of Jesus: the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and fear of the Lord, the Spirit of joy in God's presence.

In my visits to synod assemblies during the last two years I have challenged our sisters and brothers to engage actively in God's mission to the world. And in this call to action I have put before them a statement and asked if they would agree with it, something I would ask you to do now. If you agree with the following statement please raise your hands: "***The church of Jesus Christ has a mission.***" Is that your final answer? If you said yes, you are wrong. Keep the same word but change their order in the sentence, for it is not the same to say that "***the church of Jesus Christ has a mission***" than "***the mission of Jesus Christ has a church.***" With the first statement we bring out our strategic plans and priorities (nothing wrong with that); with the second statement, the agenda has already been set for us.

As with the apostles, we all share in the one mission and ministry there is: the mission and ministry of Jesus Christ.

My friends, it seems as if we have been at training camp for too long. We have gotten used to the practice bench. But today God is calling you to dress up, and for this call your body frame is not a matter of concern, for you have been gifted and given the mind of Jesus. The mind of Jesus reflecting God's love, compassion, inclusion, and justice. Yes, that word justice (*justicia*—even in Spanish it sounds good) that we heard yesterday from Pastor Megan Torgerson. "Justice, the form love takes when you have more than one neighbor," as the late Bishop William Lazareth used to say.

Are you ready to go? (I don't hear you)

Are you ready to go?

Almighty God, who has given you the will to do these things, graciously give you the strength and compassion to perform them! Amen