

Predigten an der Schlosskirche Lutherstadt Wittenberg

17. November 2024 – Vorletzter Sonntag im Kirchenjahr
ELCA 25th Anniversary Opening Worship



Predigt:
Reverent Bridget Gautieri
(ELCA Wittenberg Center Coordinator)

Predigtmanuskript – es gilt das gesprochene Wort!

Rev. Bridget Gautieri

Schlosskirche

ELCA 25th Anniversary Opening Worship

Opening Worship Words of Welcome –

Welcome to the opening worship service of the ELCA (Ev. L C in A) Wittenberg Center's 25th anniversary celebration. There is a lot of meaning behind worshipping here today, because it was in this very church that the opening worship service of the ELCA Wittenberg Center was held on May 9th, 1999. The Gospel reading this evening is the same Gospel text as that service 25 years ago, when Rev. Dean Bard was installed as the Center's first director. We give thanks to the Schlosskirche and Schlosskirchgemeinde, the Castle Church and the Castle Church congregation, for 25 years of partnership and working together. I look forward to our continued partnership and support in our ministries for many more years to come. I'd now like to introduce the President of the Castle Church congregation, Herr Matthias Pohl.

Luke 24:13-33

Message: God is present with us and gives us hope.

Gnade und Friede sei mit euch von unseren Herrn und Heiland Jesus Christus. Amen.

Grace and peace to you from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

"The nations rage, and the kingdoms shake; God speaks ... and the earth melts away. The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our stronghold" (Psalm 46:6-7)

It is an honor to be preaching from this pulpit for the first time in English and to be preaching on the same Gospel text that was used in the opening service of the ELCA Wittenberg Center held in this church on May 9th, 1999. Part of my job here in Wittenberg is to greet international visitors and help connect them with the local history and opportunities as they explore Wittenberg, the birthplace of the Reformation. Most of the visitors I meet are from the United States, and I have sensed an undertone of anxiety from them over the past few months. One couple said they were flying back home to Kansas on November 3rd in case the US presidential election results led to another internal terrorist attack. They wanted to be safely home before election day.

A pastor from Washington, D.C. said coming to Wittenberg for two weeks was a nice escape from the ongoing tension at the nation's capital. A couple of you seminar participants messaged me last week saying you were grateful to come to Wittenberg this week so you could have a break from the frightening news regarding the future government of the United States.

The anxiety is real, and it is profound.

Germany and many other countries are experiencing deep political strife with recent elections that increasingly show the rise of nationalism and Christian nationalism. We're seeing it here in Saxony-Anhalt and Wittenberg, too. We're living in a time of extreme polarization, and goodness, does it feel scary and lonely. Some of us are afraid to talk to our own families about issues of justice, because our beliefs are so different. The nations rage, and the kingdoms shake indeed.

In our Gospel text this evening, we find two disciples on the road to Emmaus. They, too, find themselves anxious and fearful of the future. They have put their faith in God that Jesus of Nazareth is God's son, the Messiah, the one they say is to redeem Israel, but their own chief priests and leaders handed Jesus over to be crucified. So the person they believed to be the Messiah, that person they trusted - died. This was not supposed to happen. Jesus the son of God should have been all-powerful enough to not die, right? But now he's dead. Not only did the hoped-to-be Messiah die, but now some women are saying his body is gone too. This wasn't supposed to happen either. Where is Jesus and what happened to his body?

Talk about a stressful situation. Where do you go from here? And how do you make sense of it all, when the world as you know it seems to be falling apart? A good place to start is by talking about it, which is what the two disciples on the road to Emmaus are doing. They are "talking with each other about all these things that had happened." Now a third person comes by and joins them in their conversation, apparently not knowing what has happened. When the two explain their version of the situation to him, his response is "Oh, how foolish you are," and Jesus goes on to explain his perspective.

To my amazement, even though this stranger had called them foolish regarding their beliefs, or disbelief, they invite Jesus to stay with them. Thanks to their invitation, the three share a meal together, where Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. It is in this moment that Jesus' identity is revealed to them. And once they realize who this is, Jesus vanishes and they go back to Jerusalem with their hope reignited, their anxiety and fear relieved, and their belief and trust in Jesus the Messiah confirmed.

Siblings in Christ, we have a God who defeated death and the grave, who rose again on the third day, and who took on sin and death so we would have eternal life. Like the disciples in our Gospel reading, we can see that even when our world's systems are unjust, when our governments and rulers fail us, and when we simply don't know who to trust or what to believe anymore, we have a God who walks beside on the road. We have a God who doesn't leave us alone when we're scared or anxious. No, we have a God who comes to us and meets us where we're at and reveals God's self to us.

„The nations rage, and the kingdoms shake; God speaks ... and the earth melts away. The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our stronghold” (Psalm 46:6-7)

God reminds us of God's presence with us again and again throughout scripture, because God knows we need to hear it many times and in many ways. In our First Reading, Genesis 28, God says to Jacob, “Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.” Just like the two on the road to Emmaus, Jacob wakes up and says, "Surely the LORD is in this place — and I did not know it!"

There are times in our lives when we find ourselves asking, where is God? How could God be present with us in all of our strife? Where is God when the mountains shake and the waters rage and foam, and the mountains tremble with its tumult? Where is God when our nations rage and our kingdoms shake?

Like in Genesis 28, God speaks to us. Like in Psalm 46, God is with us and is our stronghold. Like in the Luke 24, God is on the road with us and reveals God's self to us in the breaking of bread. God shows up through water and the word, through bread and wine. So in the times when we feel anxious, afraid or alone, know, that God is with us, even if we can't comprehend it or see God with our own eyes. We have a God who keeps promises and keeps showing up for us. In times of despair, may God's presence guide us and give us hope. When we share in the Lord's Supper together, know that Christ shows up, again, and is truly present with us.

„The nations may rage, and the kingdoms shake; but God speaks ... and the earth melts away. The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our stronghold” (Psalm 46:6-7)

Amen.