

God's Church is for All People

✠ **Justified in righteousness (v.1)**

✠ **Gathered in prayer (vv.6-8)**

In honor of the One whose Name means *Savior*, that's *Jesus*, dearly loved people, gathered by God:

One of the things I really love about the Millennials and other “Gens X, Z” from my own grown children is how involved they are. In grade school I remember the anger of the 60's Vietnam War protests. In my 70's and 80's high school and college, such indifference of fellow teenager “Boomers.” “Whatever!” But now younger generations are caring to “give back” and “make a difference.”

So why is Christian church membership dropping rapidly across America? You can find out with a secret tactic. If you don't know what to say to invite someone to church, Pastor Eric Roecker, director of WELS Commission on Evangelism shares personal stories to sum it up with one word: *Listen*. (*Forward in Christ*, August 2023, p.32) They'll tell you, and if that's all you knew of church, you wouldn't go either. Today let's explore God's passionate desire that **God's Church is for All People**.

✠ **Justified in righteousness (v.1)**

All the talk about “justice” these days goes deeper than politics and civil law. “Justice” is at the heart of *what the LORD says. Protect justice...* In God's holiness, every sin committed or good deed left undone is punishable by eternal hell. God didn't want that. So, He came in the Person of God's own Son Jesus Christ to pay sin's penalty with His innocent suffering and death on the cross. We *carry out righteousness* when we live up to God's gift of *righteousness* in our own lives, including loving care and concern for foreigners. *Because my salvation is coming very soon*, God said 700 years before Jesus came. *My righteousness is ready to be revealed*. And so it was on Easter morning and in Christian lives.

“Giving back,” “making a difference”? Generous WELS mission offerings established New Life Evangelical Lutheran, Shoreview, MN, 35 years ago in January. How can we “give back” to help others? Our Board for Lay Ministry (B4LM) asked a new GIVE Committee to study possibilities and recommend priorities. I can't explain all the priorities here, but I do want to focus on **Proposal #2** – Vietnamese Outreach – King of Kings Lutheran Church, Garden Grove/Westminster, CA. Why that one?

Turn back the clock to 1990, when our stained glass window was installed above the altar on the exact day the donor and designer died. Young and healthy, Steve Williams had little use for organized religion. Never told me to “get lost,” so I kept visiting. January, 1990, Steve called me, barely able to speak. Inoperable lung cancer, “10 months” almost to the day. Knowing he'd soon meet his Maker, Steve asked for Bible Information Class (BIC). He finally felt his sin and admitted his guilt. He needed to know how God took away his guilt by the shed blood of Jesus and gives *righteousness* by faith. Steve's cancerous body was wasting away while he wore a bright purple athletic suit to be asked why he was so happy. Steve's window is his legacy of thanks for God for reaching him in time at New Life in Christ.

Steve used the Trinity symbol of three interlocking circles for Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – the two lower ones as hemispheres of earth. Little did we know that God would carry many members of New Life to Africa, Asia, Europe, South America. We could not know how God would have to teach us as a synod to *protect justice* during my twelve years of service on the MN District Mission Board.

The LORD says, “...My righteousness is ready to be revealed.” True more than ever on the Internet. Strange as this may seem, it caused a major administrative “problem” between Home and World

Missions. Jet planes and satellite feeds shrunk the world to where foreigners in America hear about God's gift of *righteousness* and want to share God's grace back home. Sparing the details, WELS had to form the Joint Mission Council to coordinate Home and World Missions. In Thursday's sermon I explained the start of PSI – Pastoral Studies Institute of the Wisconsin Synod. Managed by our Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, WELS pastors train new pastors in their own culture to reach their ethnic family groups.

Our MN DMB was a major player in both WELS adjustments to real world needs. And God's servant Pastor Loren Steele was the Paul-type world missionary in those years. Loren and I would talk about our youth when neither of us knew the pristine, fully free, Good News Gospel of Jesus Christ treasured up in the WELS. All of us need to know the terrors of conscience because of our sins. But growing up on the streets of LA, Loren could only sin all the more...until the seventh Christian woman he met in a bar didn't tell him to "get lost." "So I married her," he said of his wife Charlene – both in heaven now. But Loren's legacy lives on in PSI – for Asians, and now worldwide in the Joint Mission Council.

"My salvation is coming very soon," the LORD promised (700 BC). God's Giver of Salvation fires up your heart to share grace. **God's Church is for All People – Justified in righteousness** and...

† Gathered in prayer (vv.6-8)

Skipping to verses 6-8, grace and mercy continue: *"Then the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, to minister to him and to love the name of the LORD and to become his servants, every one of them who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it, those who take hold of my covenant— I will bring them to my holy mountain, and I will make them glad in my house of prayer. Their whole burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be acceptable on my altar. For my house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples of the world. This is the declaration of God the LORD, who gathers Israel's dispersed people: "I will gather still more people to my house besides the ones already gathered."*

News from Vietnam in my youth was always war and bloodshed. Now its opened up to a WELS training school for Hmong pastors. Here in America, Friends of Vietnam, now part of Friends Network, trained two men in Boise, Idaho, as church workers, who then enrolled in PSI. This Spring Matthew Zeng was our first graduate at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. Matt came to New Life Sunday School through his mother Dr. Yaning and Loren Steele. In May, Matt's Seminary class was joined by two Vietnamese PSI graduates from Boise, Idaho, Trung Le and Tao Nguyen (WEyen). Also a son of a Pakistani doctor whom I first met in 2012 Hong Kong on a China Partners trip. Plus a former Missouri State Supreme Court Justice who began his journey from Sunday School teacher to Sem through PSI.¹

God's Church is for All People. And we get to be volunteers in God's army of witnesses for all repentant souls to be **Gathered in prayer**. That's what's so exciting about **Proposal #2** – Vietnamese Outreach. Two weeks ago at King of Kings, Garden Grove, CA, Trung Le was ordained as a WELS pastor, with classmate Grant Hagen, assigned to the Spanish-speaking congregation meeting there. Three languages and three sermons on Matthew 9:36-38 – *When [Jesus] saw the crowds, he was moved with compassion for them, because they were troubled and downcast, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore pray that the Lord of the harvest will send out workers into his harvest."* (EHV) **God's Church is for All People...**

...including skipped verses 3-5. God was thinking about victims of transgender operations on children. Growing up, some wish they could undo a surgery that robbed their young bodies of youth and family. Listen, then share how God calls them too. *The LORD says: "If the eunuchs keep my Sabbaths, choose things that delight me, and take hold of my covenant, then I will set up in my house and on my walls a monument and a name for them that is better than that of sons and daughters. I will give them an everlasting name which will not be cut off."* Mercy triumphs in Christ for all. Amen.

¹ See pictures in *Forward in Christ*, July 2023, pages 18-19. Search WELS website for "Mission Stories." For *The Preacher's Apprentice (TPA)* sermon study or copies: m.cordes@comast.net . New Life Evangelical Lutheran Church You can also call: 651-484-1169. Hear the sermon at www.newlifeshoreview.com . 180 County Rd F - Shoreview, MN 55126