



Northwest Washington Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

January 2025

Dear Beloveds in Christ,

Grace and peace to you from the Triune God who – always and without end – creates, loves, gathers and sends.

As I write this letter for you to use at your annual meetings, I am also preparing for the 2025 Northwest Washington Synod Assembly. Our theme this year comes from Galatians 3:26-28: *Woven Into God's Story*.

In the third chapter of Galatians, Paul writes that the baptized are clothed with Christ. That Christians are free from both powers that enslave and free from attempts to save oneself by works. Paul writes that in the freedom of Christ, God's love is all inclusive – no one is left behind. As Paul writes in Galatians 3:28, *"There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer enslaved or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."*

In Galatians, Paul defends God's radical grace against any and every other "different gospel," which he dismisses in chapter one as "no gospel at all." Throughout Galatians, we are reminded that even though we sometimes are tempted towards worldly validation or praise or power or whatever we think marks our success, Paul reminds us that God works in a much different way. When we are disappointed or exhausted or think that we are not doing enough, Paul reminds us that we are made beloved and we are free, through Christ.

In other words, we don't have to justify ourselves. We don't need to purify ourselves by scapegoating others. We don't need to pretend to ignore something in order to not make a mistake. We don't need to be busy for the appearance of being productive. We don't need to pretend all is well when it is not. And on and on. We are enough. Paul emphasizes that the gospel he is proclaiming enters into the very heart of what God did in Christ. And we are made for freedom: to move and dance and be in the Spirit of Christ. Together we are made to be woven into God's story.

What amazing good news. It is truly the best news – that we are freed from sin, loved beyond measure, forgiven and made new. And because of this, because of these promises, because we are set free from all that might bind us, because everyone is included in this promise, we are then free to live out the calling to be God's people. We are then free to be a blessing to our neighbor and to the world. We are then free to speak out against injustice and to listen to those who have been silenced. In other words, because we are filled and freed in Christ's love we are therefore sent out for the sake of the world.

As you gather for your congregation's annual meeting, I pray:

- that you hold onto God's promises as you discuss budget and goals, elect officers, council members and other committee people, and as you vote on compensation for pastors and staff salaries.
- that you hold onto God's promises when fear of the unknown threatens to pull you backward.
- that you hold onto God's promises as you wonder and prayerfully move towards what God is calling you and your congregation towards in the next year.
- that you hold onto God's promises as events in life and events in the world cause chaos or disruption or exhaustion.

- that you hold onto God's promises as voices cry out for justice, as immigrants cry for a home, as the temptation towards silence and apathy happen.
- that you hold onto God's promises as you are tempted to be busy for the sake of busyness or apathetic in the face of despair.

I pray that you hold onto the promises of God's radical grace, love, mercy, justice, forgiveness, and hope as you move and breathe into God's radical freedom ensured through Jesus our Savior.

I am grateful for all of you and I thank you for the honor of being your Bishop. May we trust that these promises through Christ hold us and strengthen us in 2025 and in all the days to come. May together we be woven into God's story.

In Christ's Love and Grace,

+Bishop Shelley Bryan Wee