

-Shepherd of the Mountains

Lutheran Church (LC-MS)

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The Twenty-fifth Sunday after Pentecost

The Last Sunday of the Church Year

celebrating

Lutheran Women in Mission (LWML)

November 26, 2017

“Ready”

(with thanks to the Reverend Dr. Lawrence R. Rast, Jr,
President of Concordia Theological Seminary, Ft. Wayne, Indiana
for his thoughts and theme)

Text: 2 Timothy 4:1-2

*“I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus,
who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and
his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of
season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and
teaching.”*

*“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the
Lord Jesus Christ”* (Philippians 1:2).

Ready?

Name that year!

Ready?

Instant Coffee was introduced.

The world's first Nuclear Reactor was built in
Chicago.

Johnson and Johnson developed Duck (sic) - yes, as in

“Quack, quack!” Tape - for the US Military. (The troops
originally called this new invention Duck (sic) Tape because
water ran off it like the proverbial duck's back. Only later
was its name changed to Duct Tape - after it began to be used
as a seal over heating and cooling ductwork.)

The Walt Disney film “*Bambi*” opened in theaters.
Researchers at Harvard University invented Napalm.
Ready?

“*Casablanca*” premiered - on this very day, in fact;
November 26th.

The worst night club fire in U.S. history occurred, as
The Cocoanut Grove nightclub in Boston burned to the
ground, killing 492 people.

The K-9 Corps was created, and began training dogs
for use in the military and in warfare.

Thirty-three members of the Duquesne Spy Ring, the
largest espionage case in U.S. history, were convicted and
sent to jail for a collective 300 years.

Ready?

Enrico Fermi's team was the first to create a self-sus-
taining atomic chain reaction (a.k.a. “atomic power”).

Germany's Werner von Braun invented the guided
missile.

The minimum draft age was lowered from 21 to 18.

War Bonds were introduced - immediately raising
upwards of \$13 billion dollars.

Congress created the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps
(WAAC) - whom General Douglas MacArthur later called
“my best soldiers,” explaining that they worked harder, com-
plained less, and were better disciplined than men. The Navy
WAVES, the Coast Guard SPARS, and the (civil) Women
Airforce Service Pilots quickly followed.

Ready?

The Voice of America began broadcasting.

U.S. Car Makers switched from making cars to mak-

ing war materials

Gas Rationing went into effect, limiting a person's purchase to 3 gallons per week

"Scrap Days" began to be held throughout the country - "for the war effort." Public buildings became local donation centers. Children were encouraged to bring scrap materials to school. Citizens were asked to take any scrap they could get their hands on to the local scrap dealer. All of it would then be used to create the raw materials need to build tanks, guns and ships.

Ready?

Oh - and now *this* surely will be "*a dead giveaway*"! [Are you] Ready? - and twenty-eight formal delegates - and more than one hundred Lutheran women in total - met in Chicago to encourage a greater consciousness among women for "missionary education, missionary inspiration, and missionary service."

Ready?

1942.

In particular, at least for that *last* event, July 7th and 8th, 1942.

Now there probably never *is* a "perfect" time to start an organization like the LWML; but there might never have been a more challenging time than *that* one. The whole world, after all, was at war. *Had* been, for three long years. The U.S. had joined the fight a year before. Men - young *and* old - were leaving home to fight overseas. Women - young *and* old - were leaving home to entering the workforce, to fill the vacancies left by those enlisting soldiers.

Money was tight. Rations were short. Time was next-to-impossible to find.

And yet, that unlikeliest time *was* the time . . . because those women were *ready*. Ready to confess the life-saving Gospel of Jesus Christ!

Fellow Lutherans, we just marked a time - yet another "unlikeliest" time. A time 500 years ago. A time when the world powers were just that - world powers, unchallenged, and unchallengeable. A time when one of the greatest of those powers, the Church, was not to be questioned.

And yet it was a time within that seemingly-impregnable institution . . . when the worship of saints was intruding on the worship of Christ. When a man could make satisfaction for his own sins. When good works were publicly preached as necessary to salvation. When purgatory was patently proclaimed as that place where sinners could finally "balance the scales" by making amends - *after* their death! - for their sins. When the money paid for the privilege of being permitted to pay appropriate devotion to - to *venerate* - icons or images or relics - a thumb from St. Anne, a twig from Moses' burning bush, hay of the holy manger, milk from the Virgin Mary (to name just a few of the 17,443 Frederick the Wise listed in his 1518 inventory of what he had available there at his castle church) - was said to merit the venerator a reduction in his mandatory sentence "doing time" - doing *penance* - in purgatory. (Do the other 17, 439 relics on the Elector Frederick's list, *too*, by the way, and the church assured the pious person who had rendered such diligent devotion a sentence reduction of 1,902,202 years!)

However, that unlikely university professor and parish priest was ready. Or, more accurately, God was *making* him ready. Ready to confess the life-saving Gospel of Jesus Christ! Only *first*, he had to *discover* the life-saving Gospel of Jesus Christ!

Ach, such a time! St. Paul had warned about such a time. Martin *Luther's* time. A time when that once-clear apostolic message of salvation by grace alone through faith alone would have gotten confused, convoluted, obscured. A time when the simple truths of the teaching of *God* would have been pushed aside by the teachings of *men*.

“For the time is coming,” St. Paul warned his young protégé - Pastor, or even *Vicar, Timothy*, *“when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths”* (1 Tim. 4:3-4).

Now as I said, as far as being ready - ready to make that confession of that life-saving Gospel of Jesus Christ - no, Luther, in all honesty, wasn't there yet. But *God* certainly was! He was ready to make Luther ready. He was ready to turn Pastor Luther back to His Word.

And as you well know, as Luther studied the New Testament, as he pored over St. Paul's letter to the Romans in particular, the question of righteousness jumped out at him: What did it mean to be right in the eyes of God?

And the *answer* to the question jumped out, *too*. In fact, it *tormented* him! For the Scriptures were clear about it: keep God's law perfectly. However Luther was painfully aware that he was not able to keep God's law anywhere near *sufficiently*, let alone *perfectly*! Therefore that passage positively *haunted* him day and night: *“For in [the Gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”* (Rom. 1:17).

Oh, he did everything he could, everything that great power, the Church, told him to do. He repeatedly went to his priest and confessed his sin. He faithfully dredged up every sinful thought, word, and deed he could remember, privately confessed them, received the priest's conditional absolution, and then dutifully went and did the prescribed good works as satisfaction.

Only he was never satisfied. Only he sensed *God* was never satisfied. For as often as he left confession, he remembered other sins, and that meant that the works that he did were never enough.

Until one glorious day when the dam finally broke.

Until he finally realized through the Scripture that the righteousness of God is not about *our* being good enough, but about the Father accepting *for* us the righteousness of Jesus, who kept His law perfectly. That by faith in Him, Jesus, the Righteous One, clothes each one of us unrighteous sinners with *His* perfect righteousness. And that the Holy Father in heaven - the Lord of Righteousness - now sees not *our sin*, but rather His own Son's *sinlessness*. And so declares us righteous, in order that we might be ready to confess that life-saving Gospel of Jesus Christ in word and deed in *our* time!

St. Paul could just as well have been writing to Timothy about *our* time, couldn't he?

Ach, such a time! A time when that once-clear apostolic message of salvation by grace alone through faith alone has gotten confused, convoluted, obscured. A time when the simple truths of the teaching of *God* have been pushed aside by the teachings of *men*.

“For the time is coming,” St. Paul might just as well originally have been writing to *us*, *“when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths”* (1 Tim. 4:3-4).

We're in the midst of that time - an unlikeliest time by many counts. A time when something in the neighborhood of nine out of ten Americans still report that they believe in “god,” but when their understanding of that “god” all-too-often falls far short of the God of the Bible. A time when something in the neighborhood of six out of ten Americans who call themselves “Christian” still report that there may be other ways to salvation outside of faith in Jesus.

Oh, the need to be ready - the need to be ready to confess that life-saving Gospel of Jesus Christ in word and deed - is as pressing today as it has ever been! So is it any

wonder that we could pause to celebrate Lutheran Women in Mission this morning? No offense, guys, but if our Lutheran church had generals, is it possible that one of them might justifiably have called the ladies of the LWML his “best soldiers,” explaining how they work harder, complain less, and are better disciplined than men?

For sure, they’ve made every day a “Scrap Day” with their “scrap” - or “mite” - offerings. They’ve turned public buildings - homes and churches - into local donation centers. They’ve encouraged children to bring scrap money to school - Sunday School. They’ve asked the rest of us to take any scraps we could get our hands on and bring them down here to the local scrap dealer. They’ve promised - they’ve literally pledged - to use all that “scrap” to create the raw materials needed “for the war effort.” The war against sin, death, and the devil. The war, to be more specific, against those who either haven’t heard or don’t yet know that life-saving Gospel of Jesus Christ

Oh, but it isn’t just about the *money* with these ladies. You heard what they said; it’s about “missionary education, missionary inspiration, and missionary service.”

Now I don’t serve on their Recruitment Task Force, but I can vouch for what they *claim*. I’ve seen it first hand. Let’s just say we have a beautiful Fireside Room right here in our new addition - at least in *my* mind! - just for that purpose! Here’s how their own historian, Marlys Mobert, says it: (Marlys Taege Mobert, “history of the LWML,”

<https://unite-production.s3.amazonaws.com/tenants/lwml/attachments/21814/lutheran-women-mission-history-rev.pdf>, quoted by Larry Rast)

“. . . The blessing of the LWML, known also known as Lutheran Women in Mission, goes far beyond the millions raised for missions. Its benefits can be seen in faith deepened through Bible studies, in confidence built through leadership training, in the befriending of career missionaries, in blankets and clothing gathered for the impoverished, in food share with the hungry and, above all, in the friendships

nurtured and the lives changed by sharing the love of Jesus Christ”

Sisters - and *brothers!* - in Christ, the Scripture is clear. God has called us to be His own in Christ Jesus, His Son, by the urging of His Holy Spirit. He has readied us by His Word and Sacraments. And daily He calls us to be ready - to be ready to confess that life-giving Gospel of our Lord.

Never mind the time; there never is a “perfect” time. This is the only time we’ve been given. This time, when, indeed, “*people [have] not endure[d] sound teaching, but having itching ears they [have] accumulate[d] for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and [have] turn[ed] away from listening to the truth and wander[ed] off into myths*” (2 Tim. 4:1-4).

So, I ask you what I asked at the outset: “Ready?” And I pray that your answer is, “Ready. Set. Go!”

May God grant it for Jesus’ sake.

Amen.