

Isaiah 60:1-6; Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14;  
Ephesians 3:1-12; Matthew 2:1-12

This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it, and let all of God's people say Amen!

What a pleasure, what a privilege it is to be with you this morning. Thank you for the invitation to come and be part of the true church, the church here in Camp Hill.

I bring you greetings this morning from our presiding Bishop Mark Hansen and my colleagues in the ELCA World Hunger and Disaster Appeal Team. My roll in that team is essentially to do what my mom told me to do many, many, many years ago – and that is to say “please” and “thank you.”

I have had the opportunity to go throughout our church and in fact across the world and say please remember those who have not been entrusted with as much as you have been entrusted – in other words, please remember to share your abundance with those whom God has called us to care for; that whole “feed my lambs, feed my sheep.”

The other side of that coin, I also get to say “thank you” a good amount of times. And that is principally why I am here this morning, to say thank you to you here at Trinity. Your giving, your support of world hunger allowed us last year to surpass our goal; we had a goal of \$18.75 million; your gifts along with the gifts of other ELCA Lutherans across the country came to over \$22 million last year. Thanks be to God for that – isn't that great? We celebrate that, and it's appropriate for us to celebrate the fact that God's people are responding to the needs of the world. But then what follows that right away is PLEASE don't forget that that was last year, and this is this year! It follows, doesn't it?

Now my title (I'm not sure if Pastor Hardy gave you my full 16-word job title), is Associate Director for Mission Advancement at the ELCA World Hunger and Disaster Appeal, which is too large to fit on my business cards, I realized right away. I asked that I just be allowed to use the title “story teller” – didn't go over big with the corner office, but that's the way it is – that's what I do, I'm a story teller. And it seems to me that's good model, because Jesus spoke a lot in stories, and that's what it's about.

So that's the good news – I'm here to share stories with you this morning. But I do have some bad news – I won't be lecturing you on world hunger (that's because you all have these World Hunger Basic Bulletin inserted in your bulletins. It's a brief outline of the work that we do, a little bit of history, it talks about how we do relief work through our partners at Lutheran World Federation and Lutheran World Relief; we also do development work and education and advocacy – it's all in there. And for those of you who need graphs and pie charts, there's even a pie chart for you. And one thing I want to point out on the pie chart is that because it is the church doing this work, we are able to do it at a very low 8%

overhead and administration. In the world of social justice and the world of philanthropy, that is excellent, and we can do it only because of the work that you folks do in the world and in this area of Pennsylvania.

Will you pray with me? Gracious Father: We give you thanks for this day and this season, this time when we are so thankful for the Light. And now Father, may that Light take our minds from the concerns and cares of the world and put them into the story of the Gospel. And Father, may the words of my mouth and the mediations of our hearts always be pleasing to your ear, in your Son's name we pray. Amen.

Aren't you glad it's over? I mean the holidays? I see a lot of heads nodding. I mean all the traffic and the shopping and the Christmas cards and the baking and all of that. But how about if we expand that and say, boy, I'm really glad that 2008 is over? 2008 was a dark year, wasn't it? There was a lot of dark stuff. If you read any of the recaps of 2008 in the newspapers in the past couple of weeks, you too may have been filled with that sense of woe. There's all sorts of things going on in our world – the Burmese, the Myanmar stuff in the beginning of the year. The increasing awareness we have of the food crisis. The costs of fuel – I can remember that it was almost \$5 a gallon in the Chicago area. Then the housing market tanked. The Wall Street crisis continued. The Madoff stuff at the end of the year – a lot of good charities were significantly hurt by that. And add to that the natural disasters that took place, even in our own country – the fires in California, flooding in Iowa and Minnesota and even here in Pennsylvania, tornadoes, and the hurricane that hit Galveston – a lot of dark stuff. Do you know there were natural disasters in the United States this past year than when Katrina hit? Isn't that interesting?

Boy I'm really glad all of that is over, that 2008 is over, all of that is gone, right? It isn't that simple, though, is it? Most of it has come with us in to 2009. The darkness could prevail. But as we read the stories in the Bible, specifically this text from Isaiah 60, it says, Let your light shine and push out the darkness. The gospel writer John says very similarly, The light came into the darkness and the darkness did not prevail, and the word became flesh and dwelt among us. The Light and the Word – synonymous for what? Of course, their synonymous for Jesus. This is all about Jesus coming into the world. It's about the incarnation of God coming into the world. That's why we celebrate the epiphany, that all of us know that this baby Jesus is announced to the world that this is the Messiah, this is the Light, this is the hope.

Buy why was it necessary that he be in human form? Paul writes about this and says that he took on the most humble of forms, but why was it necessary that he be in human form? There are scores of ways and reasons why, but this morning I'd like to mention three and lift up one. First, I think it was important that Jesus come in human form so that prophecy and promise might be fulfilled. And if we think about fulfillment, then also Jesus came in human form so that the Law might be fulfilled, so that the Mosaic code could be completed. And thirdly, what I really want to spend some time with today – Jesus came in human form so that he might form a new discipline. Not discipline as in punishment, but discipline as in a following of people who would see themselves as people of God. Does that make sense? So it's this discipline that Jesus was about. More than once he said "follow me" and that was an indication to become a disciple. I found truly encouraging what I read on your website, that you are considering a mission statement that talks about that very issue. The proposal, if I remember right, is "Disciples in the making,

making disciples.” That’s Jesus’ work in the world about forming disciples and then those people helping others to become disciples. It fits well.

Jesus came to form this new discipline, but in doing so He had to re-write the job description. You did know there’s a job description for those who follow God, didn’t you? There is. The job description of all time was very prescriptive, as a doctor would write a prescription, a prescribed job description delineates everything one needs to do. In the Old Testament that was called what? There were ten of them, and we call them the Ten Commandments. Initially it started as ten job descriptions, ten items, but like many employers, they let that job description expand and we ended up with over 600 in the Mosaic code; in the laws of Moses there are 614 things people need to do to be followers of God.

Well Jesus came along and said we’re not going to have a prescriptive job description any more, we’re going to have a proscriptive job description. A proscriptive job description establishes the parameters for work, rather than delineating or enumerating everything in writing, it just says these are the parameters for the work you do. And he did it in a very simple way by alluding to the first one because they came to him and asked him, what are the greatest of the commandments? And what did Jesus say? He said that you should love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul. That was the first parameter, the first boundary, of a proscriptive job description. And then he set the second parameter right away. He said the second is like the first, that you should love your neighbor as yourself. Love the Lord your God, and love your neighbor as yourself – anything you do then within that parameter is fulfilling the job description of a disciple of Christ. Easy to do, right? I don’t think so.

But what I have seen as I’ve traveled the world and as I’ve worked, first as a non-professional minister in my work as an adult in the church, and then post-seminary when I began my professional ministry, I have met and I have seen people who really are living lives as disciples of Christ. And this morning I’d like to introduce you to a few of those whom we have as a discipline, whose life we have touched.

Let me introduce you to Dr. Henry Kunawah. Dr. Henry Kunawah is the medical director of Kern Hospital in Lofah County, Liberia. Liberia is a small country on the west coast of Africa; it’s on the Atlantic coast; and it has about three million people. From 1990 to 2006 they were in a very tragic, very dark civil war. A quarter of a million people were killed. Tribal warfare. All based on the desire to have three things: the desire to have the diamonds, the desire to have the trees, and the desire to have the other metals in the ground. It was all about tribal warfare, it was all about greed and money. In 1990, Dr. Kunawah had just gotten out of medical school, and right away they came and overran his hospital. As he was leaving the hospital, word came to him that there was a woman who was having a very difficult delivery and the request was that he would visit her in a nearby village. So he did. It took about half a day to get there and when he got there he found she was indeed having a difficult delivery; the baby was breach. And as I was told by both Dr. Kunawah and the woman, as the bullets were flying through the trees, he performed a caesarian section right there. I met the mom and learned of all the other things Dr. Kunawah had to deal with. I learned that he was finally driven out of Liberia in 2002 or 2003, because it was not safe for his family. They have resettled in Texas, where he started a practice. During this time he had gotten his certification and he is now a practicing surgeon. But in 2006, he went back to Liberia, and that’s where I met him. And there I heard that he’s paid the amazing salary of \$1,600 a month (\$1,000 a month by the government of Liberia and \$600 a month by the Lutheran Church in Liberia) to work in a Lutheran hospital. After hearing all this, I asked him, why do you do this? And he said, because God is calling me to care for my people.

A disciple whom through this discipline we have helped rebuild Kern Hospital, we have helped support good nurses, we help support all of that.

Then I met a disciple called Stefan in Lima, Peru. I was talking to Pastor Andreas who was telling me about the cup of milk program at Emmaus Lutheran in what they call one of the “younger communities” of Lima. A younger community in Lima is a euphemism for a barrio, for a squatters village, for a slum. It’s still developing, so they like to call it a younger community. Emmaus Lutheran has a cup of milk program that Stefan administers. The cup of milk program started as a simple program which we support with a \$5,000 grant. Children could go there after school and get a cup of milk. The intent was that they would sit there and drink their cup of milk, to make sure that the kids were getting all of the fortified milk, and then go home. Well, after a while they realized that the kids were taking the cups home with them. And then they would come back with a larger cup. And they realized that there was something wrong here, because they realized that not only were the kids coming and getting the milk, they were taking it home and sharing it with their families. When they realized that, they started putting some grain into the milk so that there might be more substance. Stefan was telling me this, how the program is administered, how there are 180 families in the community, and how they regularly have 50 kids that come to the program seven days a week. And I looked at Stefan and asked him why do you do this? And Stefan answered, well if I don’t, who will? A disciple who understands about feeding the sheep, that it’s important to tend to the lambs. A disciple that this discipline has affected.

And then I met the disciple known as Rosalita in Nuevo Jerusalem, Mexico. Nuevo Jerusalem, New Jerusalem, is in the state of Chiapas, way down in the southern part (almost in Guatemala) of Mexico, but it’s way up in the mountains, it’s a rain forest. And the people of New Jerusalem are the Cho people, the indigenous folks, the Indians, if you will of Mexico. About a decade ago, they were visited by our partner in Mexico, called Amextra. Amextra is an association of Mexicans working in rural and urban areas to transform life for the poorest of the poor. Amextra first entered the community as a savings and loan, as a micro-financer, but then they realized there were some health concerns here for the young children; babies in the 25 to 30 percentile on the growth charts. And they tried to figure out how they might add some simple protein to the diets of the folks of New Jerusalem. They realized that there was a high tech way to go about doing this: they gave them 30 chickens. Not only did they give them the chickens, but they taught them how to raise the chickens so that they might have healthy eggs with strong shells so that then those eggs could become part of their diet and part of their commerce.

It was what we call development in the world, in developing countries, when we as one of our primary works, go into communities do development work. Development is like that old adage: if you give a man a fish he will eat for a day, but if you teach him how to fish he can feed his family. So we’ve been teaching people how to fish. We’ve been teaching people how to raise eggs through Amextra in New Jerusalem. And because they were able then to use these eggs for their commerce, they were able to expand their barnyard – they added ducks and sheep and goats and pigs and all sorts of things. They added fruit trees. It’s a wonderful story. They were so excited. What we thought would be an hour and a half to two hour time with them took four hours for them to celebrate with us all the things they have been able to do through Amextra.

Rosalita is the matriarch, you know, the chronologically advantaged woman of the tribe; she was the one who told us the stories. Towards the end of our conversation, Rosalita abruptly stood up and walked away.

I thought I had once again insulted somebody. But as it turned out, she had gone back to house, and as we were getting into our van to go to our next stop, she returned carrying a gift. It was a blue plastic bag (like one of those bags we get our newspapers in – you know, those long, thin bags) and I couldn't see into it. She was carrying it very carefully, holding it at the top with her other hand beneath it. And because it was blue, I couldn't see what it was and was getting a little concerned, because this is a culture that wastes nothing. But as soon as she handed me the bag, I knew exactly what it was – they were eggs. And they were still warm. She had gone back to her home (and as is the case in many developing countries, they raise their chickens in their home), her hens lay their eggs under her bed. She had collected her entire day's production, put them in the bag, and brought them. And as she was handing them to me, she said, here, I know you will do good things with these. God bless you. And God bless the ELCA.

Did you get the disciple stories there? Does it remind you of the parable of the widow's mite? Someone who was free to give all that she had, not from her abundance, but from her all. She gave it all away, knowing that God would do good things with it.

I know that you here at Trinity understand what it means to be a disciple. And that's why I encourage you to think about your proposed mission statement, because you get it. You understand what it means to live the life of one who follows Christ. You are involved in Lutheran World Relief with the fair trade foods. You make the quilts. You're involved in Camden, New Jersey. You do other good things here in the communities of Harrisburg and Camp Hill. You're involved in the broader church. You care for your young people. You get it! Of course I also invite you never to forget that we have to keep working because this is a working discipleship. But also hear what Rosalita said to me: she said thank you, God bless you, and God bless the ELCA.

So, hear Rosalita's words through me because when she said God bless the ELCA, she was saying thank you Trinity Camp Hill.

Amen