



**NEW SCANDINAVIA  
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For this month I am reading a story I am very familiar with. A pastor and preacher, through the popularity of his sermons before enormous crowds, emerged as the leader of a vigorous movement of church reform. He attacked corruption among his fellow clergy and strongly advocated lay spirituality through knowledge of Scripture and frequent communion. Among his accomplishments was a vernacular translation of the New Testament. But when he spoke out about the pope's authorization of the sale of indulgences, this man gained attention that was good but not for him.

This story may sound familiar, but it may not be the man you are thinking of.

*Lord, Jesus Christ, it is for the sake of the gospel and the preaching of the word that I undergo, with patience and humility, this terrifying, ignominious, cruel death.*

The life of Jan Hus, Czech priest and reformer, was almost exactly concurrent with one of the most serious crises in the history of Christendom- the Great Schism of the papacy (1378-1417). For nearly forty years, the church was torn between claims of two and ultimately three popes. Though Hus's theological works did not directly address this crisis, in an ironic way history made them inseparable. It was at the Council of Constance (1414-1417), summoned to resolve the papal schism, that Hus was burned as a heretic.

The story of Hus's trials and betrayals at the hand of princes, rival popes, and sometimes friends is exceedingly complex and not easily summarized. Scholars have tended to exonerate Hus of the charges brought against him. (It is reported that Pope John Paul II is among his supporters of his rehabilitation.) There is little doubt that his positions were misrepresented by critics less interested in the truth than in their own political and ecclesial agendas.

To be sure, the stakes were high, for the papal schism threatened the entire social order of Europe. But in the face of this crisis, Hus advanced a position different from the two principle contending camps. On the one hand there were those who insisted on the monarchical authority- in a situation of rival pontiffs- was a less-than-ideal basis for unity. Instead, they sought to resolve the crisis by appeal to the higher authority of church councils.

Hus pursued a more mystical and evangelical approach. Christ alone was head of the church. The only sure basis for reform and unity was to be found not in any juridical conception of power but in an understanding of communion rooted in moral conversion and holiness. To partisans on either side, Hus's position sounded at best unrealistic, and at worst a kind of dreamy anarchism.

Hus was issued a promise of safe conduct to defend his views at the Council of Constance, which had been convened to resolve the schism. Upon his arrival, however, he was arrested and imprisoned. After a shamelessly biased inquiry- closer to a canonical lynching- he was convicted of heresy and turned over to the secular arm for punishment. On July 6, 1415, he was publicly burned.

The courage and serenity with which Hus met his fate, insisting on his innocence while forgiving his enemies, left many witnesses wondering whether the condemned heretic was not in fact a saint. Like the early Luther, to whom he is often compared, Hus combined a deep loyalty to the church with an outspoken discernment of its various pathologies. He represented a bridge between a rigidly institutional model of the church and a freer, spiritual model. In burning that bridge, the council fathers resolved one crisis only to prepare the way for the far greater upheavals of the following century.

As for Hus, who might have escaped death had he willingly renounced his theology, he wrote his own epitaph: *"It is better to die well than to live wickedly. One should not sin in order to avoid the punishment of death. Truth conquers all things."*

God's peace be with you.

Pastor Sara

### **Information on ringing the bells.**

Before telegrams, phones, radio, TV, and the internet existed, when even newspapers were few and far between, church bells were a source of information. They warned of fires and invasions. They signaled the start of church services and town meetings. They also served as an instant obituary notice, through an ancient practice called the death knell. Today, most church bells are only rung to signify the start of worship.

In some traditions, including the Catholic tradition, a church bell is rung three times a day; 6am, noon, and 6pm; as a way of reminding people the importance of entering into prayer.

Many use it to announce the start of worship: Bells may be rung multiple times, such as three or seven times, to call people to worship. Some churches have a series of rings to prepare people to come to church- 1 hour before worship begins and again 15 minutes before worship.

Some churches ring the bell during the Lord's Prayer as a way of inviting others who hear the bell to join in this prayer. That way, farmers still in the barn or out in the field can also participate in praying with the congregation. A toll would be rung at "Our Father...", at "Give us this day...", and a third toll at "...Amen".

The bell may ring three times at the beginning of a funeral service and close by ringing it as many times as the deceased was alive (if they were 65 at the time of death, the bell would toll 65 times).

There is so much to the ringing of the bell that there are even ways of ringing it; faster for calls to worship and slower for funerals. But no matter how it rings or how many times, no matter if the sound comes from a church's bell tower or from the church's organ, it is truly a gift we share as we all sing out "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

## **Why do we pray for other Synods?**

The question arose a few months ago- "Pastor, why are we praying for other synods?" It's a question I have been asked numerous times since we began this in January. The quick answer is that our churches and synods need prayers, not because something is wrong but simply that praying for others is what Jesus asks us to do. Sometimes we know stuff that is going on around the country and sometimes we don't, but we pray anyways.

But there is a longer answer to the question of "why?". Since I was a little Lutheran, I have noticed how we pray for ourselves and the people we know and that's as far as it goes. But the church is much larger than that. Have you noticed on Sunday morning that when I introduce the Creed, I ask us to join with others around the world as we all confess our faith in this one creed? Do you realize that as you are joining with others within this congregation to declare our common belief, people in their homes, at other congregations in our area, in other states and even in other countries are doing the same thing? Maybe even at that exact time? The church is much bigger than us and they too need prayer.

When we read Paul's letters to the Corinthians, Romans, Galatians, and Philemon, he was connecting with and praying for people and churches all over "the

world.” It’s what the Bible has taught us to do. No matter the reason, I hope this begins to answer the question of why we are praying for other synods in the ELCA. In Matthew 28:19, Jesus says *“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded...”* I intentionally mention each synod’s world companion partner because this ministry is bigger than the United States/ Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Every synod is connected with another world church, showing that God’s church is much bigger than we could imagine. And these world connections are not what some may think they are; the US giving our money away to people we don’t know for things we might not want our money spent on, for things we don’t understand. But this relationship is not one sided. Our synods are connected with “companion synods”, people that are working together, to make God’s presence known throughout the world, not just our small congregations in Northwest Wisconsin.

God's peace be with you.

**Rev. Sara C. Feld**