

Psalm 100:5

I bring you greetings from the faculty and staff of Concordia Theological Seminary of Ft. Wayne, Indiana.

It is a great joy for me to be with you for this celebration weekend, and an honor to have been invited to preach for this anniversary service. My preparations for the trip to Springfield brought back many memories from the time when this was my hometown, from 1965 to 1976.

You should know that if this had been an ordinary invitation to a preaching engagement, I would not have accepted. Currently I am on a six-month sabbatical from the seminary, through May, in order to write a commentary. For this period my rule has been to turn down requests to speak and preach, in order to devote myself to the writing project, with that as the priority. However, when I was asked to be here for this service, I made an exception to the rule, primarily for three reasons. One is that I graduated from Trinity School in 1966, which is also the year I was confirmed in this congregation. A second reason is that Pastor Radtke is my seminary classmate, and my friend. A third reason is that Stacy Cameron is on the anniversary committee, and Stacy and I were eighth-grade classmates at Trinity – and Stacy was one of my main competitors for the top grades – but also my friend.

1860 – that was nineteen years after the origin of this congregation, and the year in which the members took on the name “Trinity Lutheran Church.” In 1860 the Lutheran school system in Springfield was started by Trinity’s one-room school. Quoting from the booklet written for the 140th Anniversary of this congregation: “The original school, we

believe, was held in a rented room or a residence, with the pastor expected to teach in addition to performing his pastoral duties, and with a few short term teachers.

Apparently this arrangement was not entirely satisfactory.” As a result, a church-owned school building was established in 1866, and professional teachers were called from the Missouri Synod. Subsequently the school existed at various locations in Springfield until the building at Governor and MacArthur was dedicated in August, 1954. As most of you know, a new addition to that building, the Parish Education Center, was dedicated in September, 2001.

With Ps. 100:5 as our text, we are grateful for

150 YEARS OF THE LORD’S GOODNESS AT TRINITY LUTHERAN SCHOOL.

Due to this goodness, theological and general education has taken place, and a response comes forth from us. May God bless our meditation on His Word.

I. Indeed, because of the Lord’s goodness, theological education has been carried on for 150 years at Trinity Lutheran School. We have been the beneficiaries of such instruction. This is education based on the Word of God, Scripture, and specifically, which teaches this Word.

God has caused us, and those before us at Trinity, to believe the assertions of Scripture, that it is really His Word, written by authors moved by the Holy Spirit. All of Scripture is the inspired, inerrant Word of God.

Thus, the Old Testament and the New Testament present the same truth, the same God. In our verse the Deity is referred to as “the LORD” (capital letters), which is the translation of the Hebrew “Yahweh.” That was His personal name, the name He revealed

to Israel, His covenant people of the Old Testament era, and before the nation Israel came about, to Adam and Eve, and their descendants.

The Old Testament also makes known that this one God is three Persons, and that revelation continues into the New Testament. Yahweh is Triune – Three in One – the Trinity. We believe in the same God as did Adam and Eve, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Isaiah, and the author of our text. We, too, worship Yahweh.

Our faith, our confession, which we learned, and which is taught, at Trinity Lutheran School, stands against atheism, which is now becoming more militant. Aggressive atheists are saying that it is harmful to promote belief in God. We say, “No! That is denying spiritual reality.”

Our confession is the opposite of the notion that there are many gods, or that all the world religions in essence worship the same god. We affirm that there is only one, true God, and that this God is Triune – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. That is what Trinity Lutheran School has stood for, and still proclaims today.

Scripture makes clear, and we learned, that the Triune God is holy. He wants people to live in a certain way, as shown by His commandments. Because God is holy, and He does not change, there are moral absolutes, which are timeless. That concept is poo-hooed today, relegated to the dust bins of a by-gone era, attacked as being narrow-minded. Consequently there have been major changes in our society. What was not even mentioned before, has now become mainstream. People laugh off the clear message of Scripture, or deny it, or try to twist it by the maneuvers of liberal theology.

However, just because people call certain behaviors “fine,” “O.K.,” does not necessarily mean that is the truth. If the behaviors are contrary to God’s Word, which

does not change, but stands forever, they are wrong. Those people are forgetting who is God. They are not God. They do not set the rules; God does. And God will not continually tolerate being mocked.

Moral absolutes have been, and are, taught at Trinity School. We learned them. The commandments of God, though, show that each one of us is a sinful human being. We, according to our original nature, are corrupt, and that has been proven by our violations of God's will with our evil thoughts, words, actions, or by our leaving undone what we should have accomplished. Since the holy God demands perfection, we could never hope to have fellowship with Him. That meant we were doomed to everlasting death, which ends up in the torment of hell. We could never save ourselves.

In the face of this crushing reality, our text gives us tremendous comfort: "the LORD" – Yahweh – "is good; His steadfast love endures forever." He is good in that He is a God of mercy, and grace – showing undeserved kindness, unmerited favor. In grace, mercy, and love God the Father sent God the Son to be the Savior of humanity, and the Son willingly accepted this mission. This Savior, as we know, was promised already in the pages and era of the Old Testament. The Son of God became a sinless human being in order that He might be the Substitute for you, me, and all people. The God-man, Jesus Christ, lived a holy life in our stead, keeping all of God's commandments. Then He took the entire load of our sins, and those of the whole world, on Himself, and suffered the full, awful, damning penalty for those transgressions with His agony and death on a cross.

The glorious good news, the cornerstone of the Christian faith, what we love to confess – is that Jesus did not stay in the tomb, but he arose from the dead. There is no

question about it – Jesus is the Savior! He is the only Savior. On the one hand, only through faith in Christ is a person saved. On the other hand, anyone who believed or believes in the Savior – no matter the sins committed, and their number – had or has salvation.

Through this Gospel Word God the Holy Spirit – in His grace, mercy, and love – brought us to faith in Jesus. For most of us this occurred in our baptism as infants, with the Gospel joined to water. Through faith in Christ we receive, we are clothed with, the righteousness, the perfection, Christ acquired for us and all people with His holy life and innocent suffering and death. The result is that we are accounted, acquitted, and accepted. God accounts us, regards us, as righteous, perfect, for Jesus' sake. God acquits us of the guilt of our sins, we have total forgiveness, for Jesus' sake. God accepts us as His children, we have blessed fellowship with Him, for Jesus' sake. We possess everlasting life now, which will continue in the joy and splendor of heaven.

Ps. 100:5 also says with regard to the Lord that “His faithfulness” endures “to all generations,” that is, forever. God is faithful to us. He preserves and strengthens our faith through His Gospel Word and Supper, in which we receive the very body and blood of Christ. Through these means of grace he keeps us close to Himself. No power can separate us from His love. God is always with us, helping us through this life, giving us the strength and comfort we need to endure trials, afflictions, and persecutions.

The Lord is faithful to all the promises in His Word. One day He will take us, as His children – specifically, our spirits – to heaven. On the Last Day God will raise our bodies to perfection, glory, and immortality, and join them once again to our spirits. We,

body and spirit, will live forever with the Lord in the new creation which He will bring about on Judgment Day.

This is the Gospel Word which we learned, and which became a part of us, at Trinity Lutheran School. This Gospel we heard and read in religion and confirmation classes, in hymns and songs. This Gospel we came to recognize not only as the power of God unto salvation, since through it God brings a person to faith in Christ, but also as the power of God for godly living. Through His Gospel Word and Supper God motivates and empowers us, whom He made into new people when He converted us, to bear fruit for Him. We devote ourselves to serving the Lord, no matter what role we occupy. We see ourselves as lights in this spiritually darkened age, as witnesses for Christ, showing forth our faith by our words and actions.

This way of thinking we gained, or was reinforced in us, at Trinity. The 1966-67 Handbook states the objectives for the school in these words: "The Christian Day-school gives a daily, formal, spiritual feeding to children in a regularly scheduled religion hour every morning of the school week. But it goes far beyond this. It creates an atmosphere of Christian living throughout the day for the child: Christian teachers strive, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to impress upon the child during every hour he is in school, that he is part of the body of Christ and must live in such a way when he studies, works and plays, as to give evidence of his faith and of this conviction." In love and humility we want to have the truth shared with others, so that they, too, can become part of the body of Christ. We understand that the world is not to change the Word of God, but that the Word of God can change the world.

This, then, is theological education. It is instruction in, and based on, Scripture, which presents the whole counsel of God's Word, both the Law, and especially, the Gospel. This is the main reason for Trinity, and for any Lutheran school. This is the most important aspect of the whole education process, without which a person may have knowledge, but not true wisdom. As a Spanish proverb states, "Some of the greatest fools ever known were learned men." Because we have been blessed with a theological education at Trinity and elsewhere, we, by God's grace, have life in proper perspective: we evaluate everything by the Word of God – "How does this line up with Scripture?"; we see that we are to live to God's glory; and we have as our greatest joy knowing Jesus as our Lord and Savior.

II. "For the LORD is good; His steadfast love endures forever, and His faithfulness to all generations." Based on that portion of Ps. 100, there are two remaining considerations for us in this service, which can only briefly be covered. One is that, because of the Lord's goodness, excellent general education has been carried on for 150 years at Trinity Lutheran School. We were blessed to have received such instruction.

This general education at Trinity was and is, however, permeated, and shaped, by theology, that is, Scriptural truth. We studied other subjects, and participated in various fields of learning, to *God's* glory, and were directed to use what we gained for *His* honor and the benefit of *others*. We were reminded that God made this world and universe, with all of their wonders and mysteries, and to give Him praise as the Creator.

This general curriculum gave us broad, and necessary, exposure to, and experience in, different branches of instruction, besides theology. We learned the 3 R's – reading, writing, and arithmetic – plus science, social studies, music, art, and we had gym class,

and participated in athletic activities. We benefited from a well-rounded education, which gave us superb preparation for high school, and beyond.

Our time at Trinity was a crucial part of the background, a critical component of the educational foundation, which enabled us eventually to have our occupation, and positions of responsibility, and to carry out our work and duties in the proper way, and so be helpful members of society, and to exert a positive influence in our various roles. Thus the Trinity “effect,” so to speak, has extended throughout Springfield, and to wherever graduates of the school have lived and served.

We were so shaped that, by God’s grace, we can, and do, operate in today’s world as Christians, with class. The poet Robert Frost once said that “education is the ability to listen to almost anything without losing your temper or your self-confidence.” Our education at Trinity gave to us that ability, especially since it imparted to us steadfastness through the Word of God, and instilled in us confidence, not merely in ourselves, but chiefly in Christ.

Speaking of self-confidence, that grew in us at Trinity not only inside, but also outside, the classroom. We all have personal recollections; I’d like to share with you a couple of my memories. Being a patrol boy – I thought that was the neatest thing. Putting on the orange belt around the shoulder and waist – that was cool. Then marching out with the other guys as a troop, and being stationed at one of the crossing locations, and helping other students cross the street, and finally, marching back to the flagpole at the school entrance, taking down the flag, and carefully folding it – all that made you feel important, and instilled confidence.

Another memory is of the rope hanging from the ceiling in the gymnasium. In gym class we had to climb, or attempt to climb, that long, long, slender piece of hemp to the very top. Entering Trinity in the eighth grade, that was a new challenge for me. For the first two-thirds of the school year, I couldn't do it. I'd reach up, pull with my arms – and that was as far as I'd get. Then it dawned on me – you can use your legs and feet in climbing! With your feet wrapped around the rope, acting as a base, you can pull yourself up just a little bit at a time. Using that strategy, I finally made it to the top. Praise the Lord! That gave me confidence.

The combination of the theological education and general education, the formal curriculum and informal curriculum, what happened inside and outside the classroom – made for a rich learning experience at Trinity. Imparted to each one of us were lessons for life. One more example from me.

My eighth-grade class graduated in the Spring of 1966. Different class members were selected to have various parts in the graduation ceremony. I was chosen to speak on the class motto. Having written the speech, I next memorized it. My determination was not to use a manuscript, but to deliver from memory. I had that speech down pat in my mind; wake me up in the middle of the night, and I could recite it. I was ready to go.

The night of the graduation arrived. The class members carried out their assigned portions of the program. My turn came to speak. There, on the stage in the gymnasium, I was more nervous than anticipated, seeing all the people seated on chairs on the gym floor. I began to speak, but like a machine. I was on automatic pilot. Suddenly, I didn't know where I was in the speech. Dead silence. An awkward pause – that probably stretched on for about 45 seconds. Longest 45 seconds of my life. I could see that people

in the audience were shocked, and many were looking down. I tensed my legs; they must have been hard as steel. *Finally*, I recalled the last words that had been uttered, recognized where I was in the speech, and was able to finish it.

After the ceremony, during the reception, people were very polite and kind to me. Typical was this comment: “Good speech, Maier. I’ll never forget it.” Well, I never did, either. That was a lesson lasting for life. Since that experience, whenever I have given a sermon or speech, I always have the manuscript with me.

The remaining consideration, based on Ps. 100:5, is that, because of the Lord’s goodness to Trinity Lutheran School for the past 150 years, a response comes forth from us. The verse previous to our text reads, “Give thanks to [the LORD] ... bless His name!” We give thanks to God for His bringing Trinity school into existence, and His preserving and blessing it for a century and a half. Thanks be to God for all the faithful teachers and pastors who have been, and are, involved in educating the students. We offer thanks to God for the members of the congregation who have done so much, in so many ways, to keep the school going. We, students at, and graduates of, Trinity, are grateful to the Lord for what the school has meant to us, and the impact it has had on us. We give thanks to the Lord for His letting the beneficial influence of Trinity extend into Springfield, this country, and other parts of the world.

Another aspect of our response is pledging ourselves anew to doing what we can to support Trinity Lutheran School. For some of us, that will involve financial contributions. That means sacrificial giving. But we remember Bok’s law: “If you think education is expensive, try ignorance” – and, we might emphatically add, spiritual ignorance. For all of us, this support means praying for Trinity, that God would continue

to preserve the school, bless its endeavors, empower the teachers and pastors, and grant the students growth in knowledge and wisdom.

Congratulations, Trinity Lutheran Church and School, on this amazing 150th Anniversary! During this celebration, we above all direct our thoughts to the Lord, “for [He] ... is good; His steadfast love endures forever, and His faithfulness to all generations.”

Amen.

Trinity Lutheran Church, Springfield, IL, March 7, 2010. Walter Maier III.