

The Lord Has Done Great Things For Us

**Messiah Lutheran's Morning School Of The Bible**

**"The Lord Has Done Great Things For Us!"**

**(And We Are Filled With Joy)**

**March 3, 2019**

**Psalm 126:1-3 & 2 Corinthians 5:14-20**

**by Pastor David Nygard**

**Psalm 126:1-3 (NIV)** The psalm writer proclaimed, <sup>1</sup> "When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dreamed. <sup>2</sup> Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy. **Then it was said among the nations, 'The LORD has done great things for them.'** The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy."

**2 Corinthians 5:14-20 (NIV)** Paul wrote, <sup>14</sup> "For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. <sup>15</sup> And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. <sup>16</sup> So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. <sup>17</sup> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! <sup>18</sup> All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: <sup>19</sup> that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. <sup>20</sup> **We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.**"

I'm glad that we can talk together. Today we have many things to celebrate. God loves us and has a plan for each of our lives; to give us hope and a future. Jesus died to bring us forgiveness. (and it's a gift) Last but not least, God has done something new in our congregation. By his grace we have built a Family Life Center that will change our lives and the lives of many generations not yet born. We dedicate that center this afternoon.

**God loves the word "new". He loves to do the unexpected. He likes to surprise us with good things.** If you ever get tired of living the same old, same old way, ask God to surprise you with something new: a new heart, a new purpose, or a new faith challenge. Never give up.

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**In Psalm 126, the psalm writer is excited. God has done the unexpected.** The people of Israel had been conquered by the Babylonians; the most powerful army on earth. They carried off the Jews to a far off nation. For fifty years Israel had to live without home, freedom or their place of worship. It happened to many nations. But this time God did something new. He allowed the Jewish people to return to their homes and country.

The Psalm writer almost shouts, **“<sup>1</sup> When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion (our people), we were like those who dreamed. <sup>2</sup> Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy.”** Everyone had this wonderful smile on their faces and in their hearts.

We read that **“Then it was said among the nations, ‘The LORD has done great things for them.’”** Every nation of the world took notice. There was only one conclusion. God had done great things for the little country of Israel. The Jews came alive in their faith and said, **“The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy.”**

Here at Messiah Lutheran we feel the same way, **“The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy.”** A Lutheran pastor with many years of experience, said to me after seeing our new building, **“How exciting to see a Lutheran church that is thriving! That is a rarity”**. Sad, but true.

Churches of every denomination are struggling to keep their doors open. Attendance is down. The giving isn't there. Volunteers are hard to find. The economy has been crazy. Participation in church has stopped being a priority in America. Even so, little Messiah Lutheran decided to take a step of faith and grow the ministry of their congregation.

It wasn't the first time. We started out as a tiny Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran congregation 112 years ago. We ate lutefisk and pickled herring. We talked like we had just got off the dragon boat from Oslo. We told Ole and Lena jokes. God loved us anyway.

Then the congregation grew older. The membership dwindled to forty-five people, most of them on fixed incomes. They decided to take a step of faith and move to a new part of town and start over. They borrowed \$200,000; a fortune back then and built on the corner of Jefferson and Houbolt. Almost immediately the congregation grew by 100 people a year. We worshipped in this sanctuary but had our classes in local school rooms.

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Then it came to a point that we needed to have Sunday School rooms, offices and a fellowship hall. So, we borrowed \$1,000,000 and took another step of faith. It seemed an impossible challenge, but we continued to grow because we never stopped preaching the good news of Jesus Christ. Our members made people feel welcome. We tried to obey the Bible in all things. We took compassionate stands on the social issues of today. By God's grace we paid off our loans early.

Seven years ago, our buildings were aging and needed repair. (The same words describe me.) Our youth ministry had outgrown their space. We had three services each Sunday to meet growing numbers. Then I went on a sabbatical. Our leaders asked me to come back with a plan. I came back with twelve suggestions They included making repairs on our facility and doing studies to see if we needed a Family Life Center. Others had talked about it before me.

Our three pastors talked about it and prayed. We presented it to our church boards, and they prayed about it. Our leaders did every kind of survey to see if change was needed. Finally, we presented it to the congregation. After much debate and discussion, we voted to start the building project.

It never occurred to me that the whole process would take seven years. I remember shaking my head when the fund raising consultant said that we needed to get 300 of our members to serve on special committees. 300 people? We had trouble getting an extra usher on Sunday morning.

The first people I talked to were Pat and Gerry Boe who served as our project leaders. People trusted them. Together we got 300 volunteers; most of them volunteered here for the very first time. All of them said afterwards, "Let's do it again".

We had many wise members who said that we couldn't build this building in our day and economy. And they were right, so we didn't do it, we let God build it. Do you remember how we had 24 hour prayer vigils at the church seeking God's intervention? People like our church president Bob Robertson committed to praying every single day for seven years for God to be honored in this project.

I remember the disappointment I felt when the Fund Raising Expert told me that although our members were generous with their pledges that we would not raise enough money. We were going to fail. But all of us kept

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praying. Our theme was that everyone needed to give what they felt was right. **We knew that each of our gifts would be different, but our sacrifices would be the same.** The end result is that we raised \$2,0086,365 and finished the building without ever borrowing one cent. None of us are wealthy people. But our God provides! Praise the Lord!

What can we say now that the building is finished? **“We were like those who dreamed. <sup>2</sup> Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy.”** People will say about us **“The LORD has done great things for them”** We will say, **“The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy.”**

I can't say enough about the countless hours that our volunteers and committees spent looking at blueprints and furniture, cutting costs and making sure that everything was done right. Not everyone gave money to the project, but they said their prayers, worshipped on Sunday, gave to current expenses and welcomed visitors. Praise God for your help.

**Now here's the interesting thing. We didn't do this to gain new members – although that would be great.** Our goal is to become a teaching church; to offer programs that people in our neighborhoods can attend and take home to their families. We can offer classes like AWANA, RENEW YOUR WEDDING VOWS and FINANCIAL PEACE UNIVERSITY for Christians to take back to their congregations.

We want programs like OWLS, QUILTING, V.B.S or Bible Studies for our own members of every age – to deepen their faith in Jesus Christ. We want to have fun doing it. A gymnasium is a fun place. **But the real reason for our projects is that God loves the word “new”.**

God loves the word “new”. We discover this in Paul's letter to the Corinthians. Maybe, just maybe, you are hungry for something new. Maybe you need a reason to get up in the morning. Maybe you feel like giving up.

Here's our new motivation. Paul wrote, **“<sup>14</sup> For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, ...<sup>15</sup> And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them...”**

**Simply said, Jesus died for us for two reasons. #1) he died to bring us forgiveness. #2) He died so that we would no longer live for ourselves.** We are meant to live for him. Life isn't just about us. Other

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people need what we have to offer. Do you remember the fun we had after reading the book Hole In The Gospel? We spent two years as a congregation raising money to send cows, chickens and pigs to poor farmers around the world through Project Heifer. We made a difference.

Paul wrote **“<sup>16</sup> So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view.”** God wants to give us new eyes and a new heart. When we look at people, we don't have to judge them or ignore them like the world treats them. We can love our neighbor and impact their lives. We can feed the hungry and encourage the lonely. We can protect the unborn and help women in need.

Paul wrote, **“<sup>17</sup> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!”** The first thing that Jesus makes new is us! He takes away our excuses and gives us purpose. In the last few years I've done several new things. I've lost weight. I never thought it possible. I've learned to play the guitar. I've always wanted to do it. And I pray often. I didn't see it coming. You can do the same. I'd love to hear from you what new things you've been trying.

Paul wrote, **“<sup>18</sup> All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation...”**

People live broken lives. They feel disconnected from God and distant from their loved ones. Maybe you know that feeling. **To be reconciled to God is to reconnect with him; to feel his love and to serve him.**

**We reconcile with each other when we reconnect with family and friends; and love them unconditionally like God loves us.**

In Paul's words we are **“Christ's ambassadors”**; God is reaching out to the world through us. We are God's hands and feet.

**Our message is simple and clear “Be reconciled to God” through Jesus Christ.**

**I hope that you hear that message in every volleyball game, church dinner and AWANA class that meets in our Family Life Center.**

**Dear friends “The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy.”** If you believe it say “Amen!” It is the truth. The best is yet to be. God bless you. Amen.

