

*Sermon from Bishop Raymond Schultz
for the Opening Eucharist of the LWF Tenth Assembly*

*St. Boniface Cathedral
July 21, 2003*

*O Christ, the healer, we have come to pray for health, to plead for friends.
How can we fail to be restored when reached by love that never ends?*

*Grant that we all, made one in faith, in your community may find
the wholeness that, enriching us, shall reach and prosper humankind.*

F. Pratt Green in LBW 360

Amen.

Dear friends in Christ, welcome to this Tenth Assembly
of our worldwide communion of churches.
Welcome, also, to the home of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada,
your hosts for this Assembly.

The joy of meeting our sisters and brothers from around the world
is almost overwhelming.

God has indeed blessed the Lutheran World Federation
with this great gift of community in Christ.

God has blessed us with the privilege of receiving your visitation.

Grace and peace to you from the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

For the healing of the world.

There is great joy in this gathering itself,
but we are called together for another purpose.

We live in a broken world,
on the surface of a broken planet,
in community with broken people.

Nevertheless, we hold onto the promise that one day
all God's dreams for creation will be fulfilled.

We are here to worship the Father,
who created nature and called it good.

We are here to follow Jesus the Healer,
the source of our hope in a broken world.

We are here to be open to the Spirit,
giver of vision in a blinded world.

We have been called, gathered and enlightened by the Holy Spirit
to bring to each other the gifts that the Spirit has given us:

- Compassion and mercy for the suffering

- Peace and reconciliation for the conflicted
- Stewardship and Sabbath for the land
- Justice and equity for the oppressed
- Shelter and hospitality for the homeless
- Leadership and direction for the misled
- Hope for those who no longer expect anything to change.

The reading from Revelation promises that
there will be a peaceful outcome to this world's toil and trouble.

The chaos created by human politics and industry
will be transformed into a peaceful and ordered realm
where the gentle are the rulers
and wholeness is the norm.

These are the images described in the closing chapters of Revelation;
a book of images so tempestuous and fierce
that the makers of violent video games have borrowed liberally from it
in the creation of their sadistic toys.

It was written against the historical background of imperial Rome,
with its program of economic and military globalization.

St John warned the church that holding on to its integrity
would bring dire consequences.

A church of Laodiceans doing successful business with Rome
would have to come to terms with
the price this business would demand of their souls.

They could not avoid the cross.

To remain faithful to Christ,
they would eventually bring chaos and destruction down upon themselves.

The unleashed anger of the mighty empire
is depicted in images of disease, warfare, fire and rampaging plague.

The business those church members were doing was not evil in itself.

The evil was in the compromise of the soul
that was demanded by those who controlled access to it.

And so John's people were called
to defy the empire's promises of peace, order and good government
in order to follow the Lamb who gave his life for the world.

The stories in the book of Revelation
retell Jesus' temptation in the wilderness.

There are many good and wonderful opportunities open to us in this world,
but the one who offers them is not God,
nor loves what God has created,
so we must, therefore, refuse them.

The cost to us is the inheritance of a world
of disorder, suffering, oppression and insecurity.

The hymn I used as my opening prayer contains another stanza that reads:

*In conflicts that destroy our health we recognize the world's disease;
Our common life declares our ills. Is there no cure, O Christ, for these?*

John's promise is that those powers of dominion and control
shall not have the last word.
The last word belongs to the Lamb
whose life was not given in vain;
rather, the Lamb is now the central symbol of the New Jerusalem.

We, as a church, can respond to many of these crises
with health, education and development programs.
Jesus, too, came healing and curing.
But that was not enough.
Only one of ten lepers came back to say, "Thank you;"
nine did not.
However, to the one who was able to be thankful, he said,
"Your faith has saved you."
That is the key,
to come to faith in Jesus Christ.

A psychologist friend of mine spoke to me
about the work he does with young people suffering from a lack of self-esteem.
He went on to talk about the high incidence
of emotional disease,
anxiety,
depression and
suicide in North American society.

There is more to healing than curing disease.
The disease we cannot cure
is the hunger to know that one is loved and valued
no matter what.
Faith is what is called for.
Before Jesus did anything to become famous or notorious,
he heard, in his baptism, that he was God's beloved Son,
and that with him God was well pleased.
That promise took flesh in him
and the passionate love that God holds for all the children of humanity, Christian or
not,
was made to dwell among us.

The youth of the LWF
have expressed their urgent desire
to be more central to the church's planning and discourse
about ministry for the future.
They raise the issue of HIV/AIDS as a huge issue for them.
Church people have been more judgmental about sexuality
than practically any other aspect of human behaviour,
yet, it is in sexual seeking that humans act out their deepest longings
for love, belonging and identity.
To have such a powerful aspect of human experience
tied to such a terrible disease

is an enormous challenge,
but also an enormous opportunity.

Here is where unconditional acceptance of sufferers
and compassion of the highest order
can touch people where their self-esteem is most threatened and
their spiritual health is most eroded
by the disapproval and censure of their society.

In a world of global economics,
how one is valued comes under other attack as well.
Human beings can become commodities
and the old demon of salvation by works assumes a new, secular identity.
One is worth what one can earn
and the place one can win in corporate board rooms.
To proclaim the victory of the Lamb,
who was slain for our salvation,
is the healing action that overcomes the world's deepest need.

As Isaiah wrote:

*Ho, everyone who thirsts,
come to the waters;
and you that have no money,
come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without price.
Isaiah 55:1*

What a beautiful city awaits us on the other side of the river,
but what a terrible swim to get to it!
The human waters of this earth are home to predators
and the waters themselves are poisonous.

Can we of the LWF build this beautiful city?
No, we cannot.
The city is the City of God whose renewal is accomplished
through the victory of the Lamb.
But when those who hunger for justice ask us
whether we are the promised ones or should they seek another,
we can proclaim a word of expectation.
We can say that they should give attention to what they have seen and heard:
the blind receive their sight,
the lame walk,
the lepers are cleansed,
the deaf hear,
the dead are raised,
the poor have good news brought to them.
We know that we cannot, by these efforts,
build the new Jerusalem.

Rather, we do these things in order to provide the world with a foretaste
of what we believe has already been accomplished for the world's healing.

We proclaim the great mystery of faith:
Jesus Christ crucified and risen.
By his victory all creation is made new.
By his bruises we are healed.

*Let the vineyards be fruitful, Lord,
and fill to the brim our cup of blessing.
Gather a harvest from the seeds that were sown,
that we may be fed with the bread of life.
Gather the hopes and the dreams of all;
unite them with the prayers we offer.
Grace our table with your presence,
and give us a foretaste of the feast to come.*

LBW Communion Liturgy

Amen!