

On the Occasion of the 51st Anniversary of Christ the King Lutheran Church (6 June 2021)

I bring you greetings from Concordia Theological Seminary. As for me, it is a great joy and honor to serve the body of Christ once again here at Christ the King Lutheran Church on this wonderful occasion and to serve once again at the altar with my long-time friend and colleague together with the Deacon and a son of the congregation and former student.

Our meditation on this fine day is drawn from all of the lessons, especially the Old Testament reading from 1 Kings 8.

In the Name of Jesus. [Amen]

[Intro] Lots of places are named after their founders. Many cities still bear those names. Fort Wayne, IN, is named for General Anthony Wayne—who built the fort there 22 years before Indiana achieved statehood. Others are named in honor of someone else. San Bernardino was named in honor of St. Bernardine of Siena, a Franciscan monk known for his preaching through Italy and other parts who died some 73 years before the Reformation. Then still other places were named for their founders ... bit later renamed in honor of another person. Not too far from here is a place originally named *Moore City* by its founder, Ransom Moore. But shortly afterward, the city was renamed for a man who pastured sheep in the area, operated a stagecoach line, and became known as the “Father of the Port of Los Angeles”: Phineas Banning.

Then there are some places ... special places ... named after their Founder ... but by OTHERS who wished to HONOR that Founder. *Christ the King Lutheran Church* is just such a place ... a special place ... named for the Founder of all genuine Christian Churches—the Lord Jesus Christ ... by those who wished to honor the Founder and were already members of Christ’s Kingdom ... by virtue of their Baptism and their God-given faith.

In the texts selected by your dear Pastor—who himself is celebrating a milestone anniversary in just a few weeks ... 25 years in the Office of the Holy Ministry!—in our texts we have laid before us a blessed truth that is so very appropriate on this celebration of the 51st Anniversary of the dedication—the founding—of *Christ the King Lutheran Church* ... on June 14, 1970. Today we consider and celebrate the wonderfully blessed truth that ...

CHRIST THE KING HAS MADE HIS DWELLING IN YOUR MIDST.

- I. The infinite, heavenly God indeed has made His dwelling on earth.
- II. Christ the King has caused His Name to dwell in this place.
- III. Christ’s heavenly Kingdom dwells in your midst.

In the Old Testament reading, we hear Solomon—as he stood before the altar in the new temple—asking, ***But will God indeed dwell on the earth? And then he turns to God: Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain You; how much less this house that I have built!*** (1KGS 8:27) Solomon recognizes the logical absurdity of what he is asking—that the infinite, boundless God should dwell in the confines of a manmade temple. It’s a reasonable question. ***But will God indeed dwell on the earth?*** God is infinite and unbound by space and time. The entire universe is not sufficient to hold Him. And He

exists eternally ... without beginning and without end ... outside of space and time. On the other hand, the earth is finite, limited, bound by space and time ... created by God (despite what the world might say). More confining still was the temple ... or a place like this building. Is the finite capable of containing the infinite?

Solomon wasn't the only one to ask this question. Entire branches of Christianity say it's **not** possible—say the finite **can't** hold the infinite. That the bread and wine of the Sacrament **can't** deliver the Body and Blood of Christ ... so they think and teach. And we must admit that at times we ourselves struggle to believe this truth as well. We have had our own sinful doubts.

Or how about this reality? The earth is full of sinners! Even people who build temples and churches are sinners. **WE'RE SINNERS!** But God is perfectly righteous and holy—not tempted by sin ... wholly set apart from sin ... abhors it ... won't tolerate it ... will one day obliterate it ... and eternally punish those who live in it. *But will God indeed dwell on the earth? With us sinners? Allow us to come into His presence? Look upon us graciously? Lift up His countenance upon us?*

The answer is in the incarnation of Christ the King. His Kingdom is not earthly. That's what He told Pilate: ***My Kingdom is not of this world*** (JN 18:36). Yet, The infinite God came into this world. Pilate gets it right: ***So you are a King?*** And Jesus responds, ***For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth.*** (JN 18:37) ***Will God indeed dwell on the earth?*** YES!! **THE INFINITE, HEAVENLY GOD INDEED HAS MADE HIS DWELLING ON EARTH.** When the eternal, heavenly Son became Man, God dwelt among us ... “tabernacled” among us ... “templed” among us in the very flesh & blood of His creation ... in our flesh. God heard the pleas of His fallen creation—He heard in heaven ... and answered on earth ... forgiving the sins of the whole world by the crucifixion and resurrection of His Son. And when God sojourned on earth, He heard the pleas of His servants—the disciples battered by a storm ... a bleeding woman ... a father desperate for his daughter lying at the point of death ... a widow mourning over the death of her only son ... a penitent tax-collector with head bowed low pleading for mercy ... a man born blind ... a lame man lowered through the roof (we know these pleas ... many of them have been our own this last year); God heard ... Christ the King heard ... and when He heard ... He healed ... and He forgave ... night and day.

God has regard for the prayers and pleas of His servants. Just as Solomon prayed that God be present in *that* temple at *that* time, so it was when God tabernacled on earth. ***Yet have regard to the prayer of your servant and to his pleas, O LORD my God, listening to the cry and to the prayer that Your servant prays before You this day, that Your eyes may be open night and day toward this house, the place of which You have said, “My Name shall be there,” that You may listen to the prayer that your servant offers toward this place. And listen to the plea of Your servant and of Your people Israel, when they pray toward this place. And listen in heaven Your dwelling place, and when You hear, FORGIVE.*** (1KGS 8:28–30) And so it is in this place where the Name of the LORD—*Christ the King*—has been made to dwell.

Will God indeed dwell on the earth? Does God indeed dwell at *Christ the King Lutheran Church*? For 51 years, God has been present to those who listen to His voice in His Holy Word, witness to the truth. “What truth?” our age asks ... “We all have truths ... are mine the same as yours?” The absolute truth ... like this one: *I, a poor miserable sinner, confess unto You all my sins and iniquities with which I*

have ever offended You and justly deserved Your temporal and eternal punishment. (DS3) And as poor miserable sinners, we have dishonored God's Name that dwells here ... with our sinful thoughts, words, and deeds. The Lord's Name [we] have not honored as [we] should; [our] worship and prayers have faltered. [We] have not let His love have its way with [us], and so [our] love for others has failed. (C&A)

And when we confess these sins, saying: *But I am heartily sorry for them and sincerely repent of them, and I pray You of Your boundless mercy and for the sake of the holy, innocent, bitter sufferings and death of Your beloved Son, Jesus Christ, to be gracious and merciful to me, a poor, sinful being—God listens in heaven, and when He hears, He forgives ... He forgives in heaven ... and He forgives also here on earth.*

Christ the King is ever-present here ... in the Holy Absolution ... through His called and ordained servant of the Word—your pastor—to forgive you all your sins. Thus, Christ continues to come into the world—into this place that bears the Name of the Founder and Perfecter of your faith (HEB 12:2)—to bear witness to this second—and most blessed—truth: that for the sake of Christ the King ... because of His holy, innocent, bitter sufferings and death on the cross ... **YOU ARE FORGIVEN**. And in this way, **CHRIST THE KING HAS CAUSED HIS NAME TO DWELL IN THIS PLACE**. Here, Christ makes His dwelling ... and upholds His honor. You do not see Him (except with the eyes of faith), but God is present ... dwelling here on earth *in this place* ... through the ministry He has ordained ... through the Gospel-Word proclaimed ... and the Gospel-Word made visible. When the called minister of Christ stands before the altar of the Lord in the presence of all the assembly and spreads out his hands toward heaven and prays ... God listens to the pleas of His servant and of His people. Through the **mouth** of His servant, **God** speaks ... and **He** forgives. By the **hands** of His minister, **Christ Himself** baptizes and places His Name and His cruciform truth upon the ✠ foreheads and ✠ hearts of His people. From the **hand** of His servant **Christ** places upon your tongue His true Body given into death **for all your sins** ... and pours out into your mouth **His true Blood** shed upon the cross **for the forgiveness of all your sins!**

Thus, you may be assured that **CHRIST'S HEAVENLY KINGDOM DWELLS IN YOUR MIDST**. Indeed, Christ's heavenly Kingdom will **forever** dwell among **all** who are of the truth and who listen to the living voice of Jesus. For even now, this altar is joined to the heavenly altar ... before Christ the King seated on His throne ... where *with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven, we laud and magnify His glorious Name*. And when this first earth has passed away, the holy city will come down upon the new earth, and we shall see—with physical eyes—what we already see and know by faith: *Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be His people ... He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more.... these words are trustworthy and true.* (REV 21:3–5)

[Concl] By His gracious mercy ... through His Gospel-Word and Holy Sacraments, **CHRIST THE KING HAS MADE HIS DWELLING IN YOUR MIDST** ... here in this place that bears His Name ... and is dedicated to the Founder of your salvation and your faith. And you can be confident that, no matter what happens in the world around you, God will continue to dwell in your midst ...

until that day when you dwell in the midst of His glorious presence ... **forever**.

In the Name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. [Amen]