

King of Glory Lutheran Church October 7-8, 2017  
Global Church Sunday: Mt 21:33-46  
Fearing the Crowds

God's grace and peace to you this day from God the Savior of the nations! Amen. Today we celebrate Global Church Sunday! Each year more than 225 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America missionaries, including Young Adults in Global Mission, serve in more than 40 countries around the world. They are sent by the ELCA in response to invitations from our companion churches and serve in a variety of roles; working alongside our companions to proclaim the gospel, raise up leaders, care for those in need and learn new ways of being church together. Serving in countries like Cameroon, Liberia, Rwanda, South Sudan, Norway, Russian, Scotland, Slovakia, Jamaica and Egypt, God calls them all over the world! They are young adults, eager to serve. They are pastors with a calling to teach and preach beyond church walls. They are doctors, with a call to practice in a place that needs their skills. However they serve, they need our prayers and support to live out their ministry. So before we go any farther, let's learn a bit more about whom our ELCA missionaries are – especially these young adults!

ELCA VIDEO Young Adults in Global Mission 3:20

Both Emmeline the Young Adult in Global Ministry and the local pastor said they learned from one another. To come alongside, learn from one another and be community together, is an essential part of missionary work. At one point in the video, Emmeline said, "The greatest gift you can give someone is to let them teach you something!"

But it wasn't always this way. Some of the earliest European Christian missions began to far flung places the continent of Africa, or China. Their objective was to make people believe what they believed, in a white god; in Christianity. They made people dress in clothes that weren't native to their land and learn a language that wasn't their own. Instead of teaching people about the Lord over all, they lorded Christianity over all. This wasn't a two way relationship, no mutual teaching here.

Now we think about mission work and global missions in a framework of "accompaniment." A young adult in global mission or a missionary will "accompany" people in their local context and culture. They will come alongside to learn about, learn from and learn with people instead of imposing specific and particular and foreign habits upon them.

In the Bible, a vineyard has always been an image of God's people. We heard it in the Isaiah reading: "the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the people of Judah his pleasant planting..."

Workers in Global missions go into vineyards of God: a vineyard in Soweto or Hungary. There they tend to the vines God already has growing. We heard that in the beginning it might be overwhelming to not know anyone or understand the language. But missionaries go with a sense of humility to learn about and from the locals. God calls the faithful like Emmeline to be a good tenant in God's vineyard. Love the people. They are children of God. Learn from them. You might be scared, but don't fear the crowd. Everything has come from me. Tend the vines, prune what is dead or dying. Bring new life. Don't fear the crowd.

On Sunday this last week there was much fear in the crowd at the Las Vegas music festival. More fear than imaginable as pops filled the night sky and people began to crumple in pain. The images have been horrific. And it wasn't only in Las Vegas. A church shooting in Tennessee church. A nursery in Brazil. 11 people hurt in London at a museum. Violence or the aftermath of violence is everywhere. It is systemic. It is pervasive. It is to be feared.

It seems these days there is no place we can go where we are safe. People thought they were headed for a relaxing evening of music off Route 91. The faithful bowing heads in prayer now hiding under pews. Children who have been put in the care of others, now their parents mourn. Where can we go? Where are we safe from violence?

And it's in our scriptures! Jesus tells this terrible story about a vineyard with wicked tenants. These tenants are violent; they harm and slaughter groups of slaves sent by a landlord. Certainly, couldn't have there been a better text assigned to this weekend? Really, we have to hear about violence at church too? Our spirits sigh.

Surely the news had gotten back to the landlord. He had to have known their fate! Otherwise he would not have sent other slaves to go pick the harvest. But Jesus says the landlord sent more slaves. Another group. And wouldn't the slaves have been afraid? "Now he's sending us to the vineyard!" Eyes wide with fear, voices trembling, last hugs with the women folks back home, and off they go.

Taken out of context, this is a terrible story. But it follows an ongoing conversation Jesus is having with the church leaders while He is in the temple. And Jesus is telling it *against* them. They are the landowners who have not treated God's prophets well. They have refused to hear a message of grace. They had not honored those in the vineyard. Now they are the landowners who are plotting to kill the Son, God's Son, and the heir who has the inheritance of salvation.

But they feared the crowds.

So they didn't arrest Jesus just yet. In this moment, their fear stopped them from acting.

Jesus knew that God had granted Him an entire vineyard to tend. Lepers. Blind. Young. Old. Spunky. Reserved. Lame. Able. These weren't His people. They were God's people and Jesus must tend to them. He didn't fear the chief priests. He called them out.

"So...if the owner comes, what do you think he would do to those wicked tenants?"

"Oh!" the chief priests said, "He'd put those wretched men to death right away."

And as we say in our Lutheran liturgy, Jesus answered. "And also with you."

Friends, there is violence in the text. But walk a bit further into the vineyard. Yes Jesus will be arrested. Yes, Jesus will be tried and a crown of thorns shoved upon His head. His body will begin to crumple in pain. He will take a last breath and utter last words.

But it will not be the last Word or the last breath. Jesus was not afraid! The violence which His body endured was transformed into new life for himself and all the rest of the vineyard – you and me!

On Sunday night, there were concert goers who ran away from the venue trying to get to safety. No criticism there. None. There were also concert goers who stayed right there on the ground to resuscitate. To protect. To carry the wounded. To hold and comfort. And in doing so, some of them died as well. The violence their bodies endured transformed and brought life to others in the face of death.

People of God, this is not the time to be afraid. Jesus was not afraid. We worship a God who yes, gave His only Son that all in the vineyard might have life. We

cannot fear the crowds. We must continue to live knowing who our Savior is. We must follow Jesus into the places and spaces of life where we might be overwhelmed, but not overcome.

Our ELCA missionaries and young adults in global mission can teach us lessons about learning from another. Learning how to listen to the other. Learning how to love the other. Learning to discuss difficult things like HIV AIDS, racism, violence, guns, and hunger. They can help us know how to tend God's vineyard and all who walk in it.

The vineyard is ready, the harvest is ripe and we cannot be afraid. The violence which His body endured was transformed into new life. Death did not have the last word! Violence did not have the last word. For the Son of God came not to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many. Not to lord it over, but to be the Lord over all.

Thanks be to God. Amen.