

“Please, cut them out!” Hebrews 4:12-16

“For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

Amazing gift. Amazing grace. The Word of God. As the author of Hebrews puts it: **“For the Word of God is living and active”**. Living and active. Living. As Jesus says: **“The words that I speak to you are spirit and life.”** (John 6:63)

Indeed, our God does everything by speaking. It is in His speaking that He calls us out of the darkness of sin and death and the power of the devil. It is by speaking that He comes to us, indwells in us, creates in us new hearts, unites us with Himself and gives us the gift of eternal life in His Kingdom of everlasting joy and blessedness. His Word does bring us true life and wonderful hope.

The Word of God is active. Yes, He is. We come here responding to Jesus’ invitation: **“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest”** (Matt 11:28). We come as beggars, with nothing to offer, trusting in His grace and mercy.

He welcomes us, He speaks and His Word actively works in us. He discerns and exposes the thoughts and intentions of our very hearts. Like a skillful surgeon He removes what is wrong, He restores us and makes us spiritually well again, He blesses us in countless ways... as we simply rest in His presence, while He serves us. All of this happens week in and out. If we listen to this living and active Word. If...

As most of you already know, last weekend something of immense significance took place in the LCA Synodical Convention. With 71% support the Way Forward Framework was accepted. What does this mean?

I tend to agree with those who say that the LCA as we knew it before does not exist anymore, something new has taken her place. We have decided to stop listening to what the Word of God says about the office of the public ministry, about pastors.

But that is only the tip of the iceberg. This decision confirms that different parts of our church listen to different authorities. To culture instead of Christ. To the world instead of the Word. It is about different understanding about our salvation, different

understanding about the Church, it is about different Gospel and different priorities for the Church's mission. The concerning trends that we have been reflecting on in our congregation the last year were on display at this Convention. We have spent 18 months, 900,000\$, countless hours of effort all around the LCA - for what?

To deceive ourselves that the Way Forward Framework is something new. As Dr Stephen Hultgren from the ALC put it, there is essentially nothing new in this project, we have voted on almost exactly the same before. This was the 6th time.

Our leaders kept assuring us that almost nothing will change, even as they clearly knew that was not true. As one pastor put it: "Don't worry, the bath tub will remain almost unchanged, we will only remove the plug."

The following morning after this decision was made, Pastor Timothy Teuscher, the president of the Lutheran Church of Canada, our closest international friends for many decades, with sadness announced that they "have no other option than to recognize that the LCA's action has severed the bond of fellowship between us." Yes, we did it!

The International Lutheran Council has made clear their position, that they are not in fellowship with those church bodies that act against God's commands. The ILC unites those churches from all continents who believe that the Bible is the Word of God, and with the "yes" vote on the Way Forward Framework the LCA has decided that "we don't want to have you as our Christian friends anymore."

Some may argue that those ILC churches are not perfect either. Amen to that! I would go even further, I would say that those are the only Lutheran Churches that clearly recognize that they are not perfect, that they are sinful and unclean, and that is why repentance and forgiveness is at the very heart of what they preach and teach.

Meanwhile for those churches, gathered under the umbrella of the Lutheran World Federation, repentance and forgiveness is not their favourite message, it is all about acceptance and social justice with a very little room for the need for repentance.

But... on the bright side. Those Lutheran Churches that believe that the Bible is the Word of God and that we are sinners in need of repentance and forgiveness, have made it clear that they will do whatever they can to support the faithful remnant in Australia. The faithful remnant... That is a wonderful and encouraging commitment.

A number of pastors already have informed their bishops that they cannot any longer be involved with wider LCA activities, some are leaving the LCA, many are considering what faithful course of actions will look like in their situation. Members of the LCA congregations who want to remain faithful to the Lord Jesus and His Word are looking for opportunities to join another Lutheran synod. There are many questions being asked by our brothers and sisters: "How do we commune? Where do we commune? Can we still commune in our congregations if our pastor is for the Way Forward

Framework? Can we still commune if our congregations remain in the LCA?" And so on... That is just this first week after the Convention. Things have changed in a profound way, and will continue to change more than we know.

As the Spirit spoke through Paul the apostle warned those who do not want to recognize God's ordering for His Church: **"If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized."** (1 Cor 14:38)

I am puzzled. How could we do this? How could 71% of delegates have ears but not hear, how could they harden their hearts despite so many calls to listen to the Word? Perhaps the 900.000\$ PR campaign paid by our donations was so effective.

For me this is a mystery of God. Why can some of our Christian brothers and sisters see clearly what is going on and some cannot? Why?! Among those who voted for the WFF there are people more knowledgeable, more educated, more experienced, more caring, more gracious, more active, more passionate for the mission of the Gospel, and God alone knows, more faithful to His Word and His calling in ways than I am not.

We may be tempted to think: "Thanks be to God that we are not like them, that we are so faithful, that we are better and more committed to the Scripture!" May such thoughts be far from us. May our Lord Jesus Christ be gracious and cut such arrogance and pride out of our hearts!

Our God tells us that we all are sinful through and through, there is no one who is righteous, no one who seeks God... no one! We are in God's Church not because of some qualities or abilities in us, but only because of His grace, only because He has spoken to us His living and active Word.

It is only by God's grace that some can discern what others cannot, we didn't merit it, we didn't deserve it, it is not because we are better... none of that, it is because our God is His wisdom guides everything to the tiniest details.

For me this is a mystery of God. How could we do that? 71%! But it is Him, our all-wise God who guides His Church, and the entire history of the world, and the lives of each one of us till their smallest details according to the best scenario.

Yes, according to the best possible scenario from His perspective! What happened last Saturday was the best scenario. Think about it for a while! The situation we are in, is the best scenario from God's perspective.

He works with imperfect beings, fallen, corrupt, wounded, hurt, foolish, rebellious beings living in this broken world. And from us He is building His Kingdom that will endure forever, and He uses all of us for His glorious purposes.

It is His mystery why He reveals His will clearer to some, and not so to others, no one can boast that we have earned His blessings with our faithfulness, but we have to ask - what must we do with the abundant grace that we have received?

What must we do with the life-giving message that He has spoken to us? What must we do with everything that the Lord has entrusted to us? Remember Jesus' words:

"Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required" (Luke 12:48).

To us much is given. What must we do? How are we to remain faithful to our Creator and Redeemer? These and other questions are before us and we will need to seek God's guidance to answer them sooner rather than later. We need to pray and ask:

"Gracious Father, we know that you want to bless us through everything that happens, please, help us to discern what You want us to do, show how You would use us to bless as many as possible with Your living and active Word! Help us, Father!"

Concluding our meditation, hear this! **"We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin."** What does that mean?

We often speak about how we are united with Christ in our baptism, but I suspect we mostly think only in one direction – how we are united to Him. But He is also united with us! Whatever you experience, He experiences.

Whatever challenges you face, He faces them with you. He not only understands you; He feels what you feel, He suffers with you. He knows exactly what it means to live in this sinful and broken world where nothing functions as initially designed.

And He invites us: **"Let us with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."** He invites you! We know that our Father in heaven is pleased with us because of what Jesus did.

Today we can with confidence draw near to His throne with our prayers for we know what we will receive. Something that we do not deserve and even fail to appreciate. His mercy and grace to help in our time of need.

This is what we need - that our faithful Father keeps us in true faith and guards and keeps us from our own sinful thoughts and desires, which we don't even understand, that He guards and keeps us from all the falsehoods and temptations of the world and the evil one, which we struggle to discern on our own.

That He blesses us richly with His Spirit of truth and peace and joy and hope, that the light of His living and active Word dispels all the darkness that is in us and around us, that He cuts out our arrogance and pride and enables us to take up our crosses and to follow our Lord Jesus Christ wherever He leads us. For that is what we need.

Glory to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit!

Amen.