

**Installation of Wolfgang Herz-Lane as Bishop of the Delaware-Maryland Synod**  
**Presiding Bishop Mark S. Hanson**  
**September 19, 2010**

2 Timothy 1:7

John 13:1

2 Corinthians 5:17-18

Grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus. Amen.

It is a great joy to be with you as we celebrate the installation of Wolfgang Herz-Lane as bishop of the Delaware-Maryland Synod. Thank you, Vice President Yolanda Tonner, members of the Synod Council and synod staff for your leadership. Thank you, interim Bishop Ted Schneider, for your exceptional leadership in this time of transition. And thank you, former bishop Jerry Knoche for your service as bishop of this synod.

Well, those of us who know Wolfgang should not be surprised by his choice of a text for today. “For God did not give us the spirit of timidity” (2 Timothy 1:7 NRSV). Wolfgang, you are nowhere close to timid. And it was this verse you chose as you addressed the synod assembly in the call process and then again following your election. “For God did not give us a spirit of timidity.” Did you hear that, church? “For God did not give us a spirit of timidity.” Church, do you believe it? For God did not give us a spirit of timidity but a power of love and self-discipline.

Please take out your timidity meters. We’re going to see just how timid we have become as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Maybe when you hear ELCA, you will think of your congregation, the Delaware-Maryland Synod, the churchwide expression or one of our institutions or agencies. Whatever part of the ELCA ecology or the whole ELCA you are thinking of when you turn on your timidity meter—with number one being timid and ten being filled with the power of the Holy Spirit and power of love and self-discipline—what does your timidity meter read? Please share that number and reasons why with someone near you. [Conversation]

What makes a church succumb to a spirit of timidity? Could it be when people talk about all that they lack and all that they have lost instead of talking about Jesus through whom we have been given all that we need?

Often I hear, “Oh, Bishop Hanson. I remember when our congregation had that spirit of power Paul wrote about. Oh yes, those were the days. Church was full, Sunday school burgeoning, giving was strong, volunteers plentiful. Oh, but Bishop, those days are long gone. We are barely hanging on. Worship attendance is way down. We could hardly balance the budget last year even after cutting back on support for synod and churchwide ministries and seminaries and partners.”

Friends, reality about our change in context and our challenges need not translate into a spirit of timidity. Bishop Wolfgang Herz-Lane, it’s time for you, for me, for the ELCA Church Council, for the Conference of Bishops, for your Synod Council, and all pastors in the ELCA to stand up and declare, “In the name of Jesus, our days of timidity are over.” By the power of the Holy Spirit, we are a church confident that we have all that we need in the treasure God has entrusted to us.

What is the treasure God entrusts to us? It is the Gospel, the Good News of Jesus Christ. The timid Christian wallows in guilt and worries that he or she has not done enough to earn God’s favor, to merit God’s mercy. The timid church stops believing that the Gospel is the power of God for salvation for all who believe. A confident Christian entrusts her or his whole life to the promise that it is God who has saved us. And God calls us into a holy life, not because of anything we have done but because of God’s own purpose and grace.

A timid church says, “Batten down the hatches. Let’s at least try to hold on and to maintain who we are and what we have.” A timid church becomes preoccupied with the preservation of a denomination or a congregation or a synod. A courageous church filled with the spirit of power says, “We will continue to plant the church. In fact, the ELCA has said that, even as we reduce budgets, personnel, programs and grants to partners, we will plant over 70 new congregations next year, over 40 of them in multicultural communities and communities of people living in deep poverty.” A living organism that does not regenerate dies.

A timid church is unwilling to look at itself in a mirror, unwilling to confront systems of power and privilege, unwilling to expose attitudes and actions that perpetuate the ELCA as a 97 percent white church. A courageous church trusts the spirit of power to free us in Christ for those of us who are white to be released of our grip on power and be reborn a Pentecost people, each in our own language telling the mighty deeds of God. A timid church says, “Well, sure. We want to welcome persons of color to our congregation and we hope that they stay. If they do, we expect that they become like us.”

A bold church believes St. Francis when he says in baptism we have died the only death that matters, leaving us free to risk every other death for the sake of life. A confident church knows that means we, who are white, dying to our power and privilege. Without the full inclusion of the rich diversity of God’s people, we are less than the community God intends, Christ redeems and the Spirit calls, gathers and enlightens us to be.

A timid church grows weary of controversies that arise when faithful people read Scripture, study the Confessions and engage other persons of faith in conversation but still do not agree with one another. A church marked by a spirit of power, of love and self-discipline shows the world that dialogue is possible, even essential. Such a church avoids rushing to judgment and closing off discussion.

A timid church says it’s time to divide. Let us separate into enclaves of the like-minded for the preservation of sound doctrine. A church marked by the spirit of power trusts the Good News: “So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old is passed away; see, everything has become new!” (2 Corinthians 5:17 NRSV)

Sisters and brothers in Christ, when I hear that in 2009 the ELCA sacrificed the gospel of repentance and transformation for a gospel of inclusion, I become very sad and confused. How can one read 2 Corinthians 5 and create that kind of polarity, that kind of either/or gospel?

Paul wrote, “So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation, everything old has passed away. See everything has become new. All this is from God.” That is a gospel of transformation. Amen. “All this is from God who reconciled himself to us through Christ.” And not just us, but the whole creation, “not counting their trespasses against them” (2 Corinthians 5:17-18 NRSV). That is a gospel of reconciliation, of radical inclusion. Amen.

And you and I are sent in the power of the Holy Spirit to be ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us. How can you be timid when God has chosen you to bring the Good News of Jesus to your neighbor, your colleague, your friend, your grandchildren? Yes, the gospel of transformation! And God has entrusted to us the message and ministry of reconciliation, the gospel of radical inclusion.

Oh, Holy Spirit, give us strength when we falter, humility when we feud. Give us confidence when we grow timid to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, believing and trusting that—even as we fumble for words—the Holy Spirit transforms and reconciles.

A timid church acts as if it is the pastor who is trained, called and expected to talk about Jesus. A church filled with a spirit of power and love and self-discipline believes that each one of us is sent from the baptismal font to be everyday evangelists.

A timid church faces the future in fear, living with haunting fears of the end: the end of life, the end of ministry, the end of energy, the end of resources, the end of the church as we have known it, loved it and served it.

The courageous and confident and bold church, filled with the power of the spirit believes what we heard from John's Gospel that Jesus "having loved his own who were in the world, he (Jesus) loved them to the end" (John 13:1 NRSV). Do we grow weary and timid because we forget who Jesus loved to the end? Jesus loved those who were at their wits' end, unable to save themselves. Mary and Martha weeping, Lazarus in a tomb, a royal official whose son lay ill, five thousand hungry people, weary disciples with nothing to feed them, a Samaritan woman at a well, a Pharisee named Nicodemus, sneaking out at night to see Jesus, a doubting Thomas, a denying Peter. Jesus loved them and Jesus loves you to the end.

This is the good treasure entrusted to us that we bear to the world. It is the good news of the end to which God has gone to save you, to love you, to reconcile us, to free us from the power of sin, death and the devil and to raise us up to new life in Christ.

Jesus went to the cross, to the place of humiliation and suffering, abandonment and betrayal, to the place of death, which became a place of redemption and reconciliation. When Jesus cried out, "It is finished," he was declaring God's mission of mercy and salvation and God's loving embrace of the whole creation. God's forgiveness is complete. There's nothing you need to add to make it complete. By the power of the Holy Spirit, just entrust your life to that promise lived by faith.

Then go. Go in a spirit of power, love and self-control. Bring that treasure to the world. Guard it so it doesn't become some other gospel, for there are many competing gospels out there.

Go to the one who lives in fear and longs for an end to anxiety. Go to the one at wit's end, unable to see an end to poverty, weary from the relentless experience of racial prejudice or gender bias. Go to that colleague in ministry who has come to the end of hope in their call and the end of confidence in their preaching, their praying and their leading. Go and share the good news that at the end and to the end, Jesus loves you.

Yes, the law brings you to the end. You know you cannot save yourself. The law brings you to your knees, but then trust God's baptismal words of promise when God said, "You are my child. I will love you steadfastly. I will forgive you mercifully. I will restore you to relationship with me to the community of my church and to the whole creation. And on the last day I will raise you up to new life eternally all for Jesus' sake."

Will you please turn to the person next to you? Mark his or her forehead with the sign of the cross and say, "Jesus loves you to the end?" Then place your hand on their head saying, "May the spirit of power and love and self-discipline be upon you."

Kosuke Koyama, an Asian theologian who passed away a couple of years ago, was reflecting upon his death. He recalled the story of Jesus' washing the feet of his disciples. Koyama said that this is how he imagines Jesus will greet us. "Looking into our eyes and hearts Jesus will say, 'You've had a difficult journey. You must be tired and dirty. Let me wash your feet. The banquet is ready.'"<sup>1</sup>

A church on its knees washing feet is not a timid church but a church filled with the spirit of power. It is not the power of domination and manipulation and lording over others, but the power of love, reconciliation and repentance.

People predicted the Lutheran World Federation would fracture at its July assembly, that differences over human sexuality would cause us to split. It did not happen. Not because we deny the depth of those differences, but we heard again and again that in the treasure of the gospel that is Christ, we are bound to be free and also we are free to be bound to one another.

The assembly will be remembered not for its divisions but for a remarkable act of love, reconciliation and repentance. This act followed years of dialogue with the Mennonites, including study of Lutheran writings and actions from Luther on—words that condemned the Anabaptists, calling for, and in some cases, causing the persecution and deaths of Anabaptists. We asked God and the Mennonites for forgiveness. When it was time for the vote on that resolution, I asked all

---

<sup>1</sup> *New York Times*: "Kosuke Koyama, 79, An Ecumenical Theologian, Dies", March 31, 2009.

who were in favor not to raise their hands or green cards, but to get on their knees as a sign of repentance and a desire for reconciliation. Then together with Mennonite sisters and brothers, we joined in a service of repentance and reconciliation. An assembly predicted to divide the body of Christ became the spirit's agent of healing the wounds in the body of Christ. Yes, there was witness to a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.

It was before the 2005 Churchwide Assembly in Orlando that I called the late Professor Walter Bouman. He was dying of cancer on his final baptismal journey of dying in the faith, and I wanted to thank him for his ministry. We talked of the upcoming Churchwide Assembly and of the impending and likely divisive votes on human sexuality. Dr. Bouman said, "Mark, before any votes are taken, you should bring in basins of water and towels and ask everyone to get down on their knees and wash one another's feet."

I believe it is time for footwashing in the ELCA. Not just one another's feet, but the feet of those who have walked away in search of another congregation or to form a new Lutheran Church, the feet of those who most disagree with you. Wash one another's feet as an act of repentance and reconciliation and then stand up in the power of the Holy Spirit. Go courageously, boldly, confidently into the world, God's world, God's weary world that seems at its wit's end. There, bear the treasures of the Good News of Jesus Christ in Word and deed. There, serve and strive for justice and peace.

Go knowing you will grow weary and even timid, but that Jesus will meet you there for he has gone ahead of you—even as Jesus meets you here—saying, "You have had a difficult journey. You must be tired and dirty. Let me wash your feet. The banquet is ready."<sup>2</sup>

Amen.

---

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.