

Continue in God's Word ¹

✚ Gratefully acknowledging the past.

✚ Faithfully addressing the present.

✚ Prayerfully awaiting the future.

In the name of Name of Jesus, the Lord of the Church, dear heirs and beneficiaries of God's Word:

It's time for anniversaries! Husbands and wives for weddings, high school reunions, Memorial Day and ultimate sacrifices for our freedom. 2009 in New Ulm, Minnesota, marked the 200th anniversary of Arminius. A.k.a. Hermann the German, stopped three legions of Caesar Augustus from Roman Empire domination of Europe. 2017 – the 500th anniversary of God restoring the sweet truth of his Word through Luther. God is faithful. And God says, ***“Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.”*** (Hebrews 13:7 NIV84)

Today we remember an event down Rice Street at old Trinity Lutheran Church near the Capitol in St. Paul. June 13, 1918, 130 confessional Lutherans established the Minnesota District of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan and Other States. 22,000 communicant members formed a new synod. 100 years later, the Minnesota District has 38,000 communicants and 47,000 baptized souls. Far beyond numbers, they wanted to stay faithful to God's faithful Word which reveals Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Our Lord instructs us to **Continue in God's Word**, first by...

✚ Gratefully acknowledging the past.

Jerusalem: first year of Jesus' public ministry. He's in the temple courts speaking to a divided crowd. Some challenge Jesus' authority and reject His message. Other Jews had new, tender faith in Jesus as the promised Messiah. These Jesus encourages: ***“If you remain in my word, you are really my disciples.”***² Christian discipleship is much more than talk. It means continuing in God's Word.

Did the Jews who stood around Jesus that day in Jerusalem remain in God's Word as disciples? We don't know. The Bible does not tell us how their lives continued. We do know what happened after that 1918 meeting in St. Paul. God blessed Lutherans with the desire and ability to continue in his Word.

What extreme obstacles they faced in the last century. That founding year of the District, 1918, right on the heels of World War I, and shortly before the Great Depression. The economy faltered until WWII. There were wars in Southeast Asia – 1950s, 60s, 70s. Middle East conflicts came home to America on 9/11. Stock market crashes rattled investors. With the foundation of people's faith shaking, some wonder, “Where is God? Why isn't he doing anything? Is His Word reliable?” Now add doctrinal struggles: discipline, election, fellowship, a painful break with Missouri Synod. Our District founders were forced to search the Scriptures and continue in God's Word, regardless of cost or consequence.

Their faith stayed strong and growing because they stayed in God's Word. Jesus says, ***“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.”*** (John 10:27f NIV84) **Gratefully acknowledge** those who continued in God's Word in their personal and family devotions, forming schools and supporting them to this day, decades of faithful Sunday School teachers and sermons focused on Christ alone for our forever hope and happiness. Without living in the past, be spurred on by Christian faithfulness to godly action.

¹ Adapted: SERMON – MN DISTRICT 100th ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

² EHV ~ *Evangelical Heritage Version*, the Wartburg Project. Northwestern Pub. House, © 2017. Order: 800-662-6022.

✚ Faithfully addressing the present.

The Minnesota District today? More than 160 congregations in four states, operating almost 60 early childhood ministries, 36 elementary schools, and three area Lutheran high schools. These serve almost 5,000 students each year. In New Ulm is Martin Luther College, the WELS College of Ministry. These are all God's gifts of people, resources, energy, effort to keep expanding in God's increase.

Why is it worth the cost? Remember Jesus: ***"If you remain in my word, you are really my disciples. You will also know the truth, and the truth will set you free."*** What truth sets us free? First, the shocking truth about ourselves by nature as we confess each Sunday: disobedience in thought, word and deed. Doing evil, failing to do good. Deserving God's punishment now and in eternity. "But I am truly sorry for my sins, and trusting in my Savior Jesus Christ, I pray: Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner."

It makes the Absolution so sweet. Jesus our perfect Substitute in life and in death is ***"the way, the truth and the life."*** (John 14:6) Yet all His life Jesus made sure He did not miss church. He continued in God's Word, learning and growing to the amazement of the temple teachers? ***"Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men."*** Are we faithful in our **present** worship?

Jesus fought Satan with ***"the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God."*** (Ephesians 6:17) He fulfilled every prophesy about him even on the cross as the Innocent One judged guilty in God's court for our sake. ***"He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed."*** (Isaiah 53:5 NIV84) When you are tempted to judge others harshly in their evangelism or their stewardship, Jesus faithfully exposes your own failings to forgive others. **Faithfully addressing the present** we trust Him through His apostle: ***"No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it."*** (1 Corinthians 10:13 NIV84) God's Word sets us free to keep growing, while...

✚ Prayerfully awaiting the future.

Abraham Lincoln once remarked: "The best thing about the future is that it comes only one day at a time." Day-by-day God's Word assures us of His loving care in our earthly lives amid confusing world events and future unknown. We don't even know what will happen tomorrow. (James 4:14)

God's Word sets us free to combat spiritual perversion in our public schools, moral bankruptcy in our country. God's gift of life is gaining ground and marriages are strengthened by our heavenly Bridegroom. The danger of confessing Christ in college classrooms and public forums is overcome by His light. Paul wrote: ***"The time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear."*** While they scratch, we pray more fervently, ***"Come quickly, Lord Jesus."***

"If you remain in my word, you are really my disciples. You will also know the truth, and the truth will set you free." Free like Sophie Boessling whose 15-year-old son Ernst from Belle Plaine volunteered to serve with the Minnesota troops. He died in September of 1863, Civil War. Sophie saved the saved the government death benefits and established what today is The Lutheran Home in Belle Plaine. "The Care of the Soul is the Soul of Care" there while **Prayerfully awaiting the future.**

During the dark days of the Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln was reading his Bible more and more. He was preparing to meet his Maker the God's Book of Books that sets us free from worry and anxiety. Lincoln's faith shines through this lasting comment: "I believe the Bible is the best gift God has ever given to man. All the good from the Savior of the world is communicated to us through this book."³ God keep us keeping on His Word to bring Christ's blessings through our Minnesota District. Amen.

³ Quoted in NETNT, © 1992. (Cleveland, Ohio: NETNT Publishing), 1992, p. xii. Used by permission.