

**TRINITY EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH  
MINOCQUA, WI  
SERMON FOR APRIL 11, 2021**

*<sup>3</sup> I thank my God every time I remember you. <sup>4</sup> Every time I pray for all of you, I always pray with joy, <sup>5</sup> because of your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now. <sup>6</sup> I am convinced of this very thing: that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. <sup>7</sup> I am equally convinced that it is right for me to think this way about all of you, because I have you in my heart, for both in my chains and in my defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all share in this grace with me. <sup>8</sup> Yes, God is my witness of how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.*

*<sup>9</sup> And I pray that your love may still increase more and more in knowledge and every insight. <sup>10</sup> This will result in your approval of the things that really matter, so that you will be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, <sup>11</sup> filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.*

(Philippians 1:3-11 EHV)

There are two kinds of people in the world. You are either male or female. You are somewhere on the spectrum of liberal or conservative. You have either an Apple smartphone or an Android smartphone. Either you are a football junkie who will watch three days' worth of NFL draft coverage and watch all 224 picks, or you respond to the word "draft" with, "Well, yeah, it does feel a bit chilly in here. When it comes to toilet paper, some of you prefer that it hang under the roll and the rest of you prefer over.

There are two kinds of people in the world. But the two kinds of people that I want to talk about are these: saved or lost. There is no middle ground. There is no fence on which to sit. There are no other options: you are saved or you are lost. In your family, there are two kinds of people. In the workplace, at school, among your friends, in your neighborhood, people you run into every day – in person or online – everyone is either saved or not saved.

Of all the statuses we could post, this is the one that matters most. I can be happy, sad, angry, impatient, disgusted, frustrated, optimistic, content, or grateful but all that matters is whether or not I am saved. Of all the hats we wear – for me there's son, brother, husband, father, grandfather, friend, citizen, reading enthusiast, history buff, fisherman – the one that matters most at the end of life, which could come at any time, is am I saved or am I not...am I lost in sin and unbelief?

When people come into the world, there is only one category: lost. I'll speak about this in the first person, but understand that this applies to you also. I don't really like to admit this, but I am a damned sinner. Whatever my current status, whatever hats I wear, whatever tasks and responsibilities and busyness I try to juggle, nothing can hide the fact that I'm condemned. You also – no matter how successful, smart, savvy, well-connected, and well-funded you are...you're condemned.

Psalm 53:3 ***"Everyone has turned away; they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one."*** I fit this description. So do you. Sin separates us from God. Isaiah 59:2 ***"Your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you so that he will not hear."***

Take an honest look at your life. The guilt of sin is all over your hands, heart, mind, and soul. We can hide it from others, but not from God. There's nothing we can do but sit and wait for death and worse.

But God couldn't sit and wait. He sent his own only Son, ***who "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) The Son of God came down to earth from heaven, allowed himself to be put up on a cross, then up from the grave as our risen Savior, the winner in the struggle for our souls, and the cause of our adoption by our heavenly Father.

He has washed me clean, forgiven every sin, even the sin of my sinful nature. He is my rock, my refuge, my comfort and strength. He is always with me as my friend, patient with me, loves me, loves you; this I know, the Bible tells me so.

This is why Paul is so filled with joy as he writes from prison. He addresses his fellow believers and us with the joy known only by the saved: ***I thank my God every time I remember you. Every time I pray for all of you, I always pray with joy, because of your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now.*** (vv. 3-5) "A few verses later, he writes, ***you all share in (God's) grace with me.***"

There is no way to adequately express this joy. It is, quite literally, inexpressible. It's always there for the Christian – joy in Jesus, joy that is ours by grace through faith, joy that is ours regardless of circumstances, joy that can never be taken away. This is joy worth sharing. This is joy we must share with as many people as possible in as many ways as possible as often as possible.

Pastor, you keep saying, "We," as if this is something we are all supposed to do. Isn't this what we have a pastor and teachers for? Uh, no. If you are a baptized child of God, you're qualified. No special schooling needed, because as you've grown in faith and understanding and come to know your Savior better, you can easily share what matters most, because you know what matters most. You don't have to make anything up, just share what you know.

Let me offer Paul's encouragement here as my own, ***I pray that your love may still increase more and more in knowledge and every insight. This will result in your approval of the things that really matter, so that you will be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.*** (vv. 9-11)

Your love for others is already evident and especially so when you share the Gospel in some way. But it will be even more evident and you will grow in knowledge and insight as you spend time in the Word, and as you gain more life experience. No one knows better what it means to have Jesus as Savior, Shepherd, Guide, Comforter than people who've relied on him for all this...and more. And you have. And you will continue to. And you can lead others to this same Savior.

Being part of a church family like Trinity highlights the joyful partnership we have in sharing the Gospel. We get to do this together and to encourage one another as we do it. But keep this in mind. Jesus did not start a church and then give it a mission. Jesus started a mission and then gave it a church. Sometimes people think about churches as places that just exist for their own sakes. Maybe they do some outreach. Maybe they send out a few people to do some good things or give a few dollars for missions. But that's not sharing the Gospel with joy. That's not fulfilling Jesus' mission.

Here's what can happen over time, if we're not careful. 60 years ago, a ship was built that was designed to be the greatest troop carrier in US naval history. It was called the SS United States. It was designed to carry 15,000 troops faster and farther without having to stop for fuel or supplies than any other ship in military history. The only thing was it never got used to carry troops.

It was such a remarkable ship that it got turned into a luxury liner for celebrities and heads of state. It contained six hundred state rooms, four dining salons, three bars, two theaters, and the comfort of being the world's first fully air-conditioned passenger ship for wealthy patrons who wanted to enjoy first class service. It was designed to be a troop carrier, to have a mission, but it got turned into a luxury liner for consumers. It's a bad thing when that happens to a church. *Really* bad. We have a mission. The church is just a troop carrier. We are not here for ourselves. We here to experience together the joy of sharing the Gospel.

Jesus' parables in Luke 15 give us the right perspective on this joy. Remember the "lost" parables there: the lost sheep, the lost coin, the lost son. Remember the joy when the lost were found? The father opened his arms and welcome and threw a huge party for his son. At the end of the parable to the lost sheep, Jesus says, ***I tell you that there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine***

***righteous persons who do not need to repent.” At the end of the parable of the lost coin: “I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”***

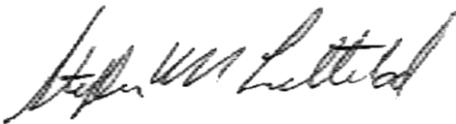
Get the point? Every time a sinner repents, comes back to the fold or actually comes to faith, there is joy in heaven unlike anything we’ve ever seen or known. In heaven, the band plays, streamers are strung, confetti is thrown, punch is poured, and the angels laugh and dance and sing. And the Father joins in!

Granted, we don’t usually see that kind of reaction, that kind of over-the-top joy when we share God’s Word, even when someone “gets it” and believes the message. But it’s there. A name is spoken, water splashes, God’s Word is proclaimed and you’ve got a freshly baptized child of God. Heaven’s throwing a party, and we’re trying to wrap our minds around how God does such an amazing thing with such simple means.

Back in the late 1990s, shortly after I first arrived in Phoenix, I received a call from a woman who asked if I would come visit her daughter. They weren’t members of any church, but had gone to a Lutheran church years ago. And now, her 25 year old daughter was dying of AIDS. Could I come and visit?

I could and I did. They lived just a mile and a half from there. The disease was almost done with her, she was down to about 75 pounds. We talked about life and death. She confessed the promiscuity that had led to her contracting the virus, she confessed all of her sins. The room smelled of desperate life and impending death but heaven threw a party. She spoke of renewed faith and trust in Christ. It was my privilege to be able to encourage her with Scripture and prayer. On my third visit, I gave her Holy Communion, as she clearly believed in the Real Presence and desired this added assurance of Christ’s love and forgiveness. It was my last visit, as she died just two days later. But there was joy, inexpressible joy. Heaven threw her a party and the Father welcomed her with open arms.

There are two kinds of people in the world: the saved and the lost. Go, seek and find, share the Gospel. Nothing matters more than this. Do it in love. Do it with joy.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Stephen W. Luchterhand". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Pastor Stephen Luchterhand  
Minocqua, WI