



November 2022



Dear Friends in Christ,

Cheryl Chipman, Donna Nelson, and I joined almost 700 brothers and sisters from Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ at Hosanna Church in Lakeville Minnesota for the 2022 Annual Gathering of LCMC. There were even family members from congregations in a dozen foreign countries.

The theme of this year's gathering was discipleship. One of the 4 key values of LCMC is a commitment to the Great Commission to go make disciples. But what is a disciple? Pastor Ebassa Berhanu explained that a disciple is an apprentice of Jesus, a follower of Jesus, a friend of Jesus, and someone who is becoming a little Christ for the world. So discipleship is what we do to follow Jesus and become like him for the sake of the world. But our discipleship can in no way add to Jesus' gift of grace for our salvation. We don't follow Jesus to get closer to him. We follow Jesus for the sake of our neighbors.

Pastor Steve Turnbull reminded us that discipleship is God's work in our lives. God is working all things for the purpose of conforming us to Jesus (Romans 8:28-29). The Holy Spirit doesn't disciple individuals in order to form a church. The Holy Spirit discipled the community of the Church in order to form disciples. It takes a spiritual village to make disciples. We must remember that Jesus brings the Kingdom and not us. We are not an adequate solution to our own problems. The Gospel is not "let's all try a little harder this week." The Gospel is the good news of what God has done and promises still to do to bring in the Kingdom. The Gospel is what gives the most hope to us and the most glory to God. Discipleship is about living in the overlap between the kingdom of this world and the kingdom of the world to come.

Pastor Graeme Sellers told a hilarious story of having his patio furniture stolen and having to buy it back from neighborhood thieves. As he was reminded everyday of what his neighbors had done, he kept getting angry. Then he realized that he had a choice to be offended or to remember Jesus' command to love his enemies and pray for them. Pastor Sellers urged us to become unoffendable Christians. Offense is feeling justified in one's anger and even feeling justified by one's anger. But offense is not a sign of spiritual maturity. Only Satan wants Christians to be offended. Every time we are offended, Satan is stealing our joy.

The worship was inspiring. The fellowship was encouraging. I especially enjoyed seeing one of my seminary professors from Madagascar. Next year's gathering is in St. Louis. I will be there and welcome anyone to ride with me.

Yours in Christ,

*Phil Nielsen*

