



Southwestern Minnesota Synod  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
God's work. Our hands.

## Southwestern MN Synod Sermon Series Mission Statement Summer 2022 + Sermon by Synod Minister Rev. Heather Culuris

*“Walking together in confidence, we cultivate life-giving congregations,  
nurture partner ministries and cooperate in the life of the ELCA.”*

### 1 Thessalonians 3:

<sup>6</sup>But Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought good news about your faith and love. He has told us that you always have pleasant memories of us and that you long to see us, just as we also long to see you. <sup>7</sup>Therefore, brothers and sisters, in all our distress and persecution we were encouraged about you because of your faith. <sup>8</sup>For now we really live since you are standing firm in the Lord. <sup>9</sup>How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you? <sup>10</sup>Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith.

<sup>11</sup>Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you. <sup>12</sup>May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. <sup>13</sup>May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.

John 10:

**10** “Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. <sup>2</sup> The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. <sup>3</sup> The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. <sup>4</sup> When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. <sup>5</sup> They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.” <sup>6</sup> Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

<sup>7</sup> So again Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. <sup>8</sup> All who came before me<sup>[a]</sup> are thieves and bandits, but the sheep did not listen to them. <sup>9</sup> I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved and will come in and go out and find pasture. <sup>10</sup> The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

Grace and peace to you during this summer season! During this time when we appreciate God's creation through so many favorite MN traditions, like baseball and fishing, gardening, and escaping to the peace and quiet of the lakes, it is good to be with you as we reflect on God's word and who we are as God's people in this synod.

An annual summer tradition for my mom and I over the last 13 years, has been to go to Women's Week at Luther Crest Bible Camp in Alexandria. During those years, we have been blessed with so many learning moments as well as deepening friendships with women of all ages from all over the state. We have been nourished by the amazing food, time in nature, and especially the contagious energy and enthusiasm of the counselors. Yet, for me, one of the best parts of our Women's Week tradition, is singing the camp songs that have come to be a core part of my faith experience. One of those songs came to mind right away as I thought about our readings for today and our synod's mission statement. The song is called "Fill my cup" and it goes like this:

"Fill my cup and let it overflow, whoa, fill my cup and let it overflow, fill my cup and let it overflow, let it overflow with love!"

We hear about this overflowing, abundant love, and life in our readings today. First, in our reading from Thessalonians, we hear Paul writing: "May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you." Then our reading from John's Gospel has Jesus promising: "I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved and will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly."

As we reflect on these two Bible passages that we hear today, there are great similarities in this language of love that is overflowing and life that is abundant. In fact, if we were to look in a thesaurus to find synonyms for the word abundant, we

would find words like: Copious, overflowing, gracious, bountiful, ample, and abounding. As we consider Jesus' promise of abundant life, hear his words again: I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. I came that they might have life and have it overflow. I came that they may have life and have it bountifully. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly! What a promise that affects our lives as people of faith, as congregations, and as a synod!

Imagine for a moment that it's early in the morning and as you are getting ready for your day, you've filled your favorite mug with your favorite kind of coffee. Maybe it's a cup of strong black coffee, maybe it's loaded with sugar and flavored creamer. Either way, you are looking forward to starting your day with that cup of coffee. Now imagine that you are holding that cup of coffee when someone comes along and accidentally bumps into you or your dog jumps into your lap and sends your mug flying. Inevitably, you spill your coffee everywhere, on the floor, on your computer, on yourself.

Then, someone comes into the room to see coffee splatters everywhere and asks you: HOW did you spill your coffee? After a bit of grumbling and mumbling, you might say "Well, somebody bumped into me!" or you might say "It's the dog's fault!" But that is only part of the answer really. You spilled the coffee because there was coffee in your cup. If there had been tea in your cup, you would have spilled tea. If it had been orange juice, you would have spilled orange juice. Whatever is inside the cup is what will spill out, is what will overflow.

So we have to ask ourselves, given the abundant life that Jesus promises, what have I filled my cup with? As people of faith, as congregations, as a synod, if we are filled with the overflowing love that Paul speaks about, how does that love overflow from us to our world?

Over this summer sermon series, we as a synod have been exploring the meaning and impact of our synod mission statement and our synod's identity. Our

readings today as they speak of overflowing love and abundant life, point us to the middle part of our synod's mission statement where we say: "Walking together in confidence, *we cultivate life-giving congregations, nurture partner ministries, and cooperate in the life of the ELCA.*"

When we as people, when we as congregations, when we as a synod, are filled with the abundant life Jesus promises, it naturally overflows from us out into the world, into life-giving congregations, hospitality, generosity, and collaboration with other ministries. When we are filled with the overflowing love Paul speaks about, that love flows out from us into our families, our congregations, our communities, in compassion and service, grace and love.

But what does it mean to live as communities, as congregations, that are life-giving, that overflow with abundant life, that share God's overflowing love with the world around us? Traveling throughout the synod, we hear so many stories of God's abundant life, God's overflowing love pouring into our world through the witness and service of faithful people and congregations. Here are just a few examples of those stories: This life-giving, abundant life in our congregations might look like a congregation in the Southwest corner of the synod that collected 165 used children's bikes, tuned them up with volunteer expertise and time, and on Pentecost, the congregation hosted a bike give-away for the community. At our synod's yearly WELCA convention in May, I also witnessed the way we live out this abundant life that overflows from us out to others as cars arrived loaded with quilts and school kits and baby care kits and more. From all around our synod, 650 Quilts, 732 School Kits, 1225 Personal Care Kits, 371 Baby Care Kits, and 74 Fabric Kits were collected to serve our neighbors both near and far. Another way I have seen God's abundant life and overflowing love has been through a youth group in St. Peter caring for Ukrainian students who fled their country because of war. As the youth of the church wrote letters and gathered candy and hats and

socks and hair ties, things to make other young people smile, the church also raised money to help these students who fled their homes and now are attending school in Budapest, without their parents who remained behind in Ukraine. God's abundant life and overflowing love could be seen in volunteers around our synod with their chainsaws and hammers and rakes helping clean up storm damage all around our synod in their church cemeteries, at Bible camps, in their communities. When God's love fills us and overflows from us, when we are filled with the abundant life of Jesus, we naturally overflow with generosity, love, compassion, service, hospitality, and care for our neighbor. We live the words from our mission statement: "Walking together in confidence, *we cultivate life-giving congregations, nurture partner ministries, and cooperate in the life of the ELCA.*"

In this week ahead, consider the words Jesus spoke in John's Gospel and hear them as meant for you and your congregation: I came that you might have life and have it abundantly. I came that you might have life and have it overflow. I came that you might have life and have it bountifully. I came that you might have life and have it abounding! Amen.