



**Evangelical Lutheran
Church in Canada**
Living Out God's Grace & Unconditional Love

Sermon

40th Anniversary of the ELCIC Worship Service

October 25, 2026

Camp Kinasao, Christopher Lake, SK

The Rev. Dr. Larry Kochendorfer – ELCIC National Bishop

Reformation Sunday

Psalm 46

Ephesians 4:1-6

EPHESIANS 4:1-6

I, therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace: there is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

~

Dear church. Grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus.

Today we are marking 40 years in the life of our church. A milestone that not only invites us to remember our story, but also to reflect on who we are today and how God is calling us forward as a church *Living Out God's Grace and Unconditional Love*.

I have chosen to mark this occasion at a Youth and Young Adult retreat at Camp Kinasao, Christopher Lake, Saskatchewan.

This sermon was prepared for Sunday morning at the retreat, with youth and young adults in mind, mindful that we gather on Reformation Sunday and that we are a church always re-forming, mindful that in an increasingly fragmented world, we are called to unity in the one body of Christ, as we have heard from Ephesians 4.

One body rooted in the love of Christ, centered in the cross of Christ, united in service to God's creation, and to a way of living characterized by love, by humility, bound to peace and to justice.

I first knew God's voice through my maternal grandmother's voice. She was twelve years old when she arrived with her family to western Canada from Scotland. Her voice had a musical quality—a lilt to it. You could dance to my grandmother's voice.



She and my entire family called me—and continue to call me—by a special name, Lar. It is a name not used beyond our family. It is a name that speaks of relationship, of intimacy, of knowing, of love.

I first knew God's voice through my grandmother's voice.

I grew up on a grain and livestock farm in northwestern Alberta, and I remember very clearly that treats of any kind were few and far between. My identical twin brother and I, and our three younger sisters loved candy and ice cream, and like most children we drooled over the chocolate bars at our local grocery store.

I remember that on one particular Sunday afternoon our mother's parents had come to visit and that sometime during the visit, Doug and I, who were five years old, noticed that our grandmother had a chocolate bar tucked away in the recesses of her purse. We saw her take the chocolate bar from her purse, break off a tiny square of dark, delicious chocolate and put it in her mouth.

Immediately our saliva glands kicked into gear—and although I'm pretty sure that it was my brother's idea—we both plotted as to how we could sneak some of that dark, delicious-looking chocolate without getting caught.

Throughout the afternoon we planned, and we planned, and we planned but we could not come up with a full-proof scheme—one that would get us the melt-in-your-mouth chocolate and not a spanking at the same time.

We were unusually patient that day—we waited, and we waited, and we waited—and finally we thought we had the perfect opportunity! Our Grandmother had left her treasure-filled purse in our parent's bedroom just off of the kitchen—and we carefully stalked the bedroom—hoping no one would spot us—our saliva glands were working overtime!

We reached into the dark, mysterious recesses of her purse and pulled out our hearts desire—the chocolate bar—thick and rich and dark. And carefully—and quickly—we each broke off a square of chocolate.

The chocolate melted instantly in our mouths. It tasted so wonderful—better than we could have ever imagined. Can you taste it?

And of course, it was so good that we broke off a second square and then a third square and so on, until finally, there were only a few squares and chocolate crumbs left.

Well, we managed the rest of the afternoon just fine—but as the day continued the churning in our stomachs became pain-filled, until finally we approached our grandmother—you see we couldn't stand our sin any longer. She was alone at the kitchen table. She sat facing us as we entered the room. It was a large, farm table—the color of the chocolate bar—in the shape of a coffin.

"We," we were unable to look at her—our eyes lowered—we glanced at each other. "Yes, what is it?" she asked.

"I...well, you know the chocolate bar in your purse?" "Yes."

"Well...yes...we ate most of it." "Ah," said my grandmother. "Did you ask permission? Did you ask me for a bite?"

"No." "Ah, what did you do then?"

"We...we snuck into the bedroom and took a few bites." "Ah, a few bites?"



"Well...yes...most of it."

Slowly our grandmother rose from behind the chocolate, coffin-shaped, large, farm table. We didn't look at her. Slowly she rounded the far side and came toward us—heavy, dark print dress, severe grey-blue hair, stern wire-framed glasses. Judgement was coming. Punishment was on its' way. And I was prepared for the discipline. I lowered my head further into my chest. But I was altogether unprepared for what my grandmother did.

In a beautiful musical lilt layered with grace and compassion and love she spoke my name, "Lar," and then she spoke my brother's name. And then, she knelt down in front of us, and she took us in her arms, and she hugged us—and as we cried and cried, she began to say over and over, "I love you, I love you, I love you. You silly boys."

I first knew God's voice through my grandmother's voice. Her voice had a musical quality—a lilt to it—dance-like: an inflection of grace, a tone of compassion, a rhythm of love.

Let the church be like this...grace, compassion, love...*living out God's grace and unconditional love.*

Let the church be like this.

In "The Gospel of the Wild Messiah," Jon Swales, a pastor, writes of this vision of the church as he speaks of Jesus:

He did not come robed in safety.
He did not come crowned in gold.
He came with dust on his sandals,
blood in his future,
and fire in his bones.

Not to keep the peace—
but to break it open.

The penniless preacher from Nazareth
walks towards the pain,
kneels where no king kneels,
calls friends what the world calls waste.

The mission of the wild messiah is
madness to the market and
mercy to the margins.

Here is a man.
Exiled flesh.
Olive skin cracked like parched land.
No one hugs lepers.
But he does.
No ritual.
Just reach.



Let the church be like this—
touching what others avoid.
Body of Christ,
move your hands.

Here is a man.
Dropped through a broken roof.
They say his legs are cursed,
but Jesus says,
“Friend.”
Forgiveness before healing.
Wholeness before walking.

Let the church be like this—
tearing open ceilings
so mercy can get in.

Here is a man.
Sworn to Caesar.
A soldier’s posture,
a servant’s pain.
Faith speaks from strange lips.
Jesus listens.
Heals.

Let the church be like this—
wide-lunged enough
to breathe in
foreign hope.

Here is a woman.
Tears on feet,
perfume in air,
shame in the room.
They call her sinner.
He calls her forgiven.

Let the church be like this—
welcoming the shamed.
Less pointing.
More tears.
Less tally.



Here is a man.
Naked in tombs.
Self-harm scrawled across skin.
Unclean,
unkempt,
unloved.
Jesus asks one thing:
What's your name?
And the demons
tremble.

Let the church be like this—
naming the silenced,
holding the haunted.

Here is a woman.
Twelve years of blood.
Invisible in a crowd.
She dares a touch—
and it stops him.
He says:
"Daughter."
A word that heals
more than wounds.

Let the church be like this—
interruptible.
Alive to power
in the unnoticed.

Here is a man.
Short in stature,
tall in corruption.
Collaboration money
stacked in a crooked house.
Jesus invites himself in.
No lecture.
Just presence.
And something changes.

Let the church be like this—
hosting grace
before repentance,
feasting with the fallen.



Here is a man.
Blind and begging.
Shouting louder
than the crowd's comfort.
Jesus halts.
Sees what others pass by.
And lets light in.

Let the church be like this—
attentive
to inconvenient cries.

This is not a clean gospel.
It smells of spit and soil,
rupture and resistance.
It weeps in alleyways
and whispers beside beds.
It eats with the wrong people
and sings in the dark.

The kingdom is not far.
It is falling
like a tear
from the face of God.

And still
he walks.
Still
he calls.
Still
he touches the untouchable
and invites the forgotten home.

Let the church be like this.
Let us be
wounded,
wild,
and faithful.

(Amen.
And amen again.)

I first knew God's voice through my grandmother's voice. Her voice had a musical quality—a lilt to it—dance-like: an inflection of grace, a tone of compassion, a rhythm of love.

Let the church be like this...grace, compassion, love...*living out God's grace and unconditional love.*

Let the church be like this.



This is my hope for the ELCIC. Youth and young adults let the church be like this—youth and young adults, brothers and sisters—siblings in Christ, let's be this kind of church together.

Thanks be to God.

During the national youth gathering, CLAY 2025 in Saskatoon, youth were asked to describe their hope for the church in just one word...and this is what they said. Let the church be like this!

(Video – One Word – CLAY 2025)

Prayer: (adapted from The Rev. Susan R. Briehl. Day 1, April 30, 2000.)

*Holy God, come among us,
in the good news proclaimed, in water and Word, present in loaf and cup,
and in the company of others who seek to follow Jesus.*

*Send us, filled with the breath of your Holy Spirit,
To breathe peace into fearful lives,
To love one another as we have been loved,
To welcome the stranger and make friends of enemies,
To forgive the sins that bind others to the past,
To serve, on bended knee, all in need of care,
To be your wounded and risen Body in the world
And to enter with joy your in-breaking, startling future. Amen*

"The Gospel of the Wild Messiah" Rev. Jon Swales

<https://www.cruciformjustice.com/post/the-gospel-of-the-wild-messiah>

