

Homily for Sunday October 29, 2023- Dr. Kathleen K Ruen

Good morning and Blessings to you. My name is Kathleen Ruen, and I am the Executive Director of Koinonia, a Lutheran Camp in the foothills of the Catskills in New York.

Many thanks to Pastor Marc Stutzel for inviting me to your congregation to deliver a homily on this blessed Reformation Sunday, share good news from Koinonia, and celebrate your participation in our Capital Campaign.

Today's two lectionary readings remind me of the geometry theorems I worked on in High School. Let's see if you remember. If $A=B$, and $B=C$, then $C=?$ Yes, you got it, A . A kind of logical thinking that works well on solving the sides of a triangle, but not necessarily helpful with theology, or let's be honest, in life.

But by leaning into the logic together, we might understand something amazing about the radical shift that Christ brought to the world, and on a smaller level, the shift that the Reformation had on our life as Christians.

The back and forth between Christ and the Pharisees in Matthew 22 is pretty logical. The Pharisees ask Christ "what is the most important commandment," Christ answers "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.'"³⁸ This is the greatest and first commandment. ³⁹And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' But Jesus has not given the Pharisees one commandment as an answer, but two, and alludes that both are equal, $A=B$. And to complicate this further, or expand it further, the second commandment Jesus brings forward "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," equates loving your neighbor with loving yourself: $A=B=C$. Therefore, as a geometry theorem, Loving God is the same as loving your neighbor is the same as you love yourself. $A=B=C$. That's beautiful.

The reading in Romans 21, a text that is at the heart of the Reformation, breaks another old theorem and offers a simple, elegant solution. Salvation and forgiveness do not come to us because we follow the commandments, obey the laws of the land, and do good works. Salvation is not an addition problem, with heaven or hell as the consequence of adding up the good or bad you did in your life. Instead, what the Reformation offered to Christians was the opportunity to let go of the guilt of what they may have done or not done in their lives, and instead realize that $A=B$, Faith in Christ = Salvation.

Both of these “equations” are helpful to remember while our world is undergoing another kind of reformation. Technology, social media, weather events, war, hunger, gun violence, ideological factions, smaller congregations, church closings: from the large to what effects our daily lives, we feel it, the change. I hold onto both scriptures during these days and offer their simple solutions to you for comfort and direction: “Love God as you love your neighbor as you love yourself,” and “my Faith in Christ is my Salvation.”

So let’s see if I can tie some of this into the story of Koinonia.

Koinonia is where God transforms and prepares people in an outdoor environment to love and serve one another.

Koinonia was established as a camp for Lutheran Congregations in 1963. Its history has been one of service to Lutherans, with a focus on Youth ministry. The camp is a 1 1/2 hour drive from Christ Lutheran Woodcliff Lake and has a 20-room hotel like conference center and four retreat cabins. It has over 1,100 acres of wilderness and trails, including a mile long lake which is private and enclosed. It is a beautiful place, and holy ground.

Koinonia suffered many losses five years ago. In the spring of 2018, a newly renovated trail building burned to the ground, and in August the camp closed due to pervasive mold in all the buildings. Local volunteers did what they could to keep the camp running. Few people had hope or faith in Koinonia’s future, and many turned their eyes away. Those who held onto their faith in Christ looked for signs of salvation.

And where there is God, there is always hope, and help. In 2020 an interim board was elected, and in the past three years the camp remediated the mold, repaired and painted buildings, put in split air and heating systems, brought wifi to the conference center and one of our retreat buildings, passed an electrical inspection and fire inspection, renovated a residential home for the Operations director and his family, put a roof on the Conference Center and three buildings, built a beautiful waterfront area, put in a new floating bridge and opened the campground. The camp followed a new path, led by God, and had faith in the promise that Koinonia could rise again. Koinonia went through a reformation.

And you, Christ Lutheran, are a part of this story. You continued to donate to Koinona when it was closed. You believed that Koinonia would be there to welcome you one day so you could receive the gift of loving one another and God

in an outdoor environment. I thank you for your faith, and your ongoing commitment to the camp.

And, with all our blessings, our faith, our love, and our help, Koinonia can now minister to visiting congregations and the local community. And we just keep moving our love out into wider and wider ripples. We have brought back the summer day camp, serving more than 100 children, celebrated our 60th anniversary with three events attended by over 250 people, have reached our 1-million-dollar base goal for our campaign and now moving toward the \$500,000 challenge goal, to date only \$250,000 away. We are blessed, we are humble, we are proud, and we thank Christ for this miracle of new life.

Koinonia has become a symbol of the transformational power of God during these difficult times, and The Board and I hope that it will be a place of renewal, reflection, and reformation for many as we move forward.

I thank you for your support during this reopening and reforming moment at Koinonia. I am so very moved to be here, at Christ Lutheran Church, to bring the joy and peace of the Gospel and of Koinonia to you. Today I celebrate you and your collaboration on Koinonia' future and the Church' future, which at this point, is far beyond what we can ever imagine. God Bless you, and AMEN.

Matthew 22:34-46

Romans 21-28 21