

Will It Continue

August 28, 2016

Colossians 4:10-18

This is the last message in my series on Paul's letter to the Colossians. The overall theme has been "The New Life (Continued)." The New Life continues with gratitude. In thanksgiving we take Jesus' Good News into a desperate and dying world. We can do that work only with good roots fed by the Holy Spirit. That's how we can live like Jesus lives.

We ask and answer a simple question. Will Jesus say "Amen" to my actions? We get better answers when we fill ourselves with Jesus' word and worship. No one can do this alone. So we pastors make a simple request. Please be my partners in prayer and proclamation. That partnership is key to the New Life (Continued).

But will it continue?

That question weighs on Paul's mind at the end of this letter. Please remember that he is in jail in Ephesus. He's been arrested for crimes against the state. In the Roman Empire such cases never end well. For Paul, the journey will end with his execution in Rome.

Will it continue? The Colossian Christians may have worried about this. Paul reminds them of all their partners in mission. The Colossians must have met some of them: Aristarchus, Mark, and Justus. Aristarchus is in jail along with Paul. The others are making sure that Paul, Aristarchus and the other prisoners are safe and have enough to eat and drink.

There is a note of disappointment here for Paul. He must have wondered why more of his fellow Jews didn't come along. I wonder too sometimes why more people just don't quite get it. Will the Church continue?

We are not in this business alone. That's one way we know it will continue. We work with other Lutheran and Christian congregations here in the Metro. We are honored to be part of the Western Iowa Synod and the ELCA. We are part of a great church! We have partners in Tanzania who are educating young women for leadership and service.

It will continue.

Paul mentions a son of the congregation who has joined the ranks of preachers and pastors. It's good to know that this isn't just about some imaginary person long, long ago in a galaxy far, far away. This is one of the ways that it will continue.

It's critical for congregations to produce new pastoral leaders. The Colossian church is only a few years old, and already they have produced a new ministry leader. That's one of the ways it continues.

When has Emanuel produced a new pastoral leader? How can we do that well and faithfully?

As your pastor, I have some major responsibilities in this area. The ELCA Model Constitution says, "Every pastor shall seek out and encourage qualified persons to prepare for the ministry of

the Gospel.” This does not mean that pastors are the only ones responsible for identifying potential church leaders; but it does mean that this does fall under the auspices of the pastoral office.

Congregations have responsibility as well. When was the last time you took a young person at Emanuel aside and said, “You should think about being a pastor”? We have a number of young people here who should consider that call. I have mentioned that to several people.

Participating in Bible camp is one of the most formative experiences for budding pastors to be. We provide financial help for people to attend our camps. We brought Day Camp to Council Bluffs. We support our camp regularly and with special gifts. And we are fulfilling a significant commitment to Lutheran Lakeside’s capital campaign.

Participating in Lutheran Campus Ministry is another critical experience for budding pastors to be. We have excellent ministries on public university campuses. We have wonderful chaplains at our ELCA church colleges. You help support those ministries with your regular and special gifts to our congregation.

Many new pastors are graduating, as are other young people, with far too much student loan debt. Some young people may be able to earn enough to pay off such debts. Most pastors don’t stand a chance of that sort of financial compensation. So congregations need to find ways to assist with the costs of college and seminary for pastors to be. If we aren’t producing one of our own as a pastor, we should consider helping to fund a proto-pastor from another congregation.

It will continue.

I am not in prison. I don’t expect to face execution for the crime of being a Christian pastor. But I wonder along with Paul, “Will it continue?” For me, the “it” is the church.

Locally, I invite you to look around. It is likely that ten years from now, a number of us will not be in these pews. Will someone else take your place? Are we preparing now for that to happen?

If we do not invest time, money and ourselves in the spiritual formation of our young people, Emanuel will not continue. If we do not invest time, money and ourselves into inviting new people into our community, Emanuel will not continue. If we do not invest time, money and ourselves in getting outside of our walls and into the world, Emanuel will not continue.

But Emanuel will continue. We have had the busiest children and youth summer in our congregation’s history. We will launch new children and youth programming in just a few weeks. You will continue to invite and embrace guests and visitors. We will continue to make life better for our neighborhood and community.

Will it continue? Of course, the Good News of Jesus the Messiah will continue to be preached and heard around the world. God’s Word never fails. The question is simple. Will the New Life continue here? It’s up to us.

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