

October 2021



## From the Bishop:

At first glance, it does not seem as though Teresa of Avila, noted Spanish Roman Catholic saint from the sixteenth century, would have much to say about today's world. You see, she is well known for her mysticism, her ecstatic prayers, several quotes that she might or might not have said, and her reforms in the church. All of these things are interesting – but what do they have to do with the 21<sup>st</sup> century and what is happening in the world today? In the last few days, though, I have been thinking about what she writes at the beginning of her work, *The Interior Castle*.

At the beginning of this book Teresa admits that she is tired. On the first page she writes, "I'm writing this book under obedience and I'm already finding it hard. God hasn't given me any desire for this work, and my head is so full of noise I can barely compose a letter about the most ordinary business, much less a book about prayer."

I am so thankful for Teresa stating it bluntly. Teresa is unsure if she'll succeed, she is not sure she has it in her to do what she is being asked to do, she is nervous and distracted. In other words, St. Teresa sounds a lot like all of us – especially when we are being asked to do something that is different or hard or difficult.

Truthfully, it can be daunting as we continue to navigate this pandemic, as we continue to navigate the changes of the world and the changing church, as we strive to live into what God is calling us to do. It is difficult, as Teresa fully expresses, to push past our fear or our unease or our malaise to do what God is calling us to do. It is pretty impossible to do a new thing without God's help and guidance.

And so, as I reflect on Teresa's difficulties, our difficulties, I am also drawn to scripture – specifically Isaiah 43. In the first part of Isaiah 43 we read:

But now thus says the Lord,  
he who created you, O Jacob,  
he who formed you, O Israel:  
Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;  
I have called you by name, you are mine.  
When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;  
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;  
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,  
and the flame shall not consume you.  
For I am the Lord your God,  
the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.

The prophet writes that God created us, God formed us. We have no need for fear because God knows each of our names. God calls each of us. We are God's. No matter the circumstance, no matter the trial, no matter the fire. This is what Teresa understood and it is what we cling to when we struggle and when we wonder if we can go on. I invite you to hold Isaiah 43:1-3 closely as we hear these words from Isaiah 43:18-19.

Do not remember the former things,  
or consider the things of old.  
I am about to do a new thing;  
now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?  
I will make a way in the wilderness  
and rivers in the desert.

As we hold close the promise that God creates us, forms us, names us, calls us, and holds us, only then can we hear the promise in these words that a new thing, a new day is coming. That God will make a way. May we hold close the words of St. Teresa and the prophet Isaiah. May you feel God's love surrounding you when all seems overwhelming. And may you rise in the strength of the Lord knowing that God's love surrounds you and fills you – and a way is being made as we all go forward together in Christ.

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## From the VEEP

Patience is not one of my virtues, and I have to say that the events of the last year-and-a-half have tried what little patience I have left. I am writing this on September 12, and the reading from James today really struck home. Here is a snippet from *The Message* to remind you: “Don’t be in any rush to become a teacher, my friends. Teaching is highly responsible work. Teachers are held to the strictest standards. And none of us is perfectly qualified. We get it wrong nearly every time we open our mouths. If you could find someone whose speech was perfectly true, you’d have a perfect person, in perfect control of life.” (James 3:1-2). This is exactly one of the reasons why I avoided what was a very clear call to teach for several years. I was sure I didn’t have the patience, or the control over my tongue, to do this very hard work. I know exactly how harmful an untamed tongue can be, and I have worked very diligently to try to keep mine under control. However, this past 18 months has put all that training to the test. As we return to in-person school, with all the anxiety and stress that entails, I find myself snapping at people who do not deserve to be snapped at. I simply do not have the time to do everything that is being asked of me, let alone do it well. I’m frustrated, I’m weary, I’m angry. I am just so DONE with all of this.

Maybe you are feeling this in your life, as well. I was called to this work – God gave me the tongue of a teacher that I might sustain the weary with a word, and yet I struggle now to find those words. I pray every day for patience, for inspiration, for “real wisdom, God’s wisdom, [that] begins with a holy life and is characterized by getting along with others.” (James 3:17) Still, it sometimes feels like it has all just been too much: a global pandemic, wildfires, hurricanes, earthquakes, political upheaval, broken relationships. How can we get back on track? Again, James has a response: “You can develop a healthy, robust community that lives right with God and enjoy its results only if you do the hard work of getting along with each other, treating each other with dignity and honor.” (James 3:18) So, I will curb my impatience and strive to afford every other person the dignity and honor they deserve as children of God, but I will acknowledge that it is HARD, HARD work and that none of us are perfect. I will apologize when my tongue slips and causes harm. I will seek the shelter of the wings of the Almighty when I need rest. I will practice grace toward others and myself, and I will pray for all those in “highly responsible” positions – teachers, pastors, governmental leaders, social workers, and more – as we continue to navigate these very troubled and troubling waters.

Here are a few things I or the Synod Council have been up to:

- The volunteer recruitment team has been raising up names for potential committee members. I’d like to thank them for this work and ask those we contact to prayerfully consider sharing their gifts with the synod.
- I met several times with the Vice Presidents Gathering Planning Committee.
- Executive Committee met on September 9. Among other actions, we approved additional funding for the Living Well project.
- Synod Council met September 18. On the agenda was appointing Pr. Sam Sseba to fill the position vacated by Pr. Herb Shao when he accepted the staff DEM position. We also reviewed the Personnel Committee’s compensation guidelines recommendations and appointed a youth/young adult male for Churchwide Assembly, as well as seating several members of the Finance Committee.

I would be happy to visit and worship with you.

Please don’t hesitate to contact me: [veep@lutheransnw.org](mailto:veep@lutheransnw.org).

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