

# GOD WHO HAS BEGUN A GOOD WORK IN YOU

by Susan K. Nachtigal, Pastor

It is striking to me that our conversations about the needs of our Trinity physical plant are coming to an initial, crucial conversation point at the same time that the church's lectionary has brought us to "*The Year of Matthew*." What this means is that, in the coming year, most of our Sunday Gospel texts will be read from the Gospel according to St. Matthew. One of the primary features of Matthew's Gospel is that, early on, after Matthew recounts Jesus' ministry of teaching, preaching and healing, he is clear to indicate that there are not just a few – but *crowds of people* – flocking to meet Jesus. (Matthew 4:23-25.)

We would all prefer that Trinity Lutheran Church still had crowds coming to meet Jesus. There was a time when Sunday morning liturgies were *packed full* in the Nave of the church. For festival liturgies, individuals and families often resolved *to come early* to make sure to get a seat. There was a time, also, when the Sunday School rooms were full. Back to back sessions were held, with additional classes meeting in any nearby closet or attic that could be found. There was a time when people all over America woke up on Sunday morning, not *deciding whether* they were going to go to church, but *knowing already* that was simply what they were going to do. It was the cycle and content of their lives – uninterrupted by the countless other activities (not to mention *having to work* to make ends meet) that now inhabit Sunday mornings, pulling us in so many different directions at once.

Such change. Trinity is in the midst of change. The church around the globe is experiencing unprecedented change. Our world is changing faster than at any other time in human history. There are countless factors contributing to this: cultural shifts from generation to generation, the secularization of America, the technology explosion, the volatile economy characterized by the growing abyss between the rich and poor, the threat of climate change, globalization and the emergence of undeveloped nations...the list is long.

What does this all mean and where will it all go? Literally, only God knows. But what we do know is that, even with the changing times and the changing demographics of our day, God is still calling this gifted, beautiful community of faith called Trinity to an important and vital ministry. The presence of this building, with its towering steeple and cross, still proclaim the mercy and love of God in Jesus Christ crucified and risen, for the sake of this city and the world. Our worship spaces, classrooms, meeting halls, music room and instruments, gymnasium, playground, parking lot and front lawn have always been here *to serve*. Our mission is to make this building and grounds serve – *in new ways, in our time*.

Our physical plant is a major asset, a gift from God and our forbearers, through which the ministry of Jesus takes place every day. The shape, size and look of the crowd is ever-changing. The kinds of ministries are evolving and requiring different flexibilities, visibilities and goals. But, engineering excellence, attentive maintenance and efficiency along with the creative use of beautiful space are the same primary means through which our predecessors sought to undergird the mission of the Gospel.

While change can be scary, it need not be bad. It can be wonder-full and life-giving as well. In faith we trust that “*God who has begun a good work in us will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.*” Over the years, the look of our labors and the physicality of our setting may change. But it is the same God who continues to work wonders from age to age.

Now, back to Matthew’s Gospel: “When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them saying:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.  
Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.  
Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.  
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.  
Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.  
Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.  
Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.  
Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5: 1-10)

These verses written in Matthew’s Gospel are known as the beatitudes. They outline for us the *core* of what it means to be Christians – followers of Jesus Christ.

In our upcoming conversations we will be discussing roofs, boilers and thermostat regulators, lighting and plumbing, pews, chairs, sound systems and the like. All of these are enormously important in their role as servants of the Gospel.

But, what is most important to keep in mind along the way is *people – God’s people*. As the Body of Christ in this world, our mission and the mission of this physical plant is the same as that of our forebearers – to minister to people during the changing and challenging times of their lives: the poor in spirit, the meek and mourning, the hungry and persecuted. As we keep foremost in our minds and hearts *this mission* of welcoming and sharing the blessings of God’s mercy, forgiveness and peace in this complex 21<sup>st</sup> Century – we will not err.

A Christmas greeting came my way the other day which I found to be profound in its simplicity. It said, “...all the best for everyone at Trinity, for all those in your care and *especially for those in need.*” As we move forward with all that is before us, our work remains the same – to bring those in need to Jesus – one by one, two by two, family by family.

God will take care of the “crowds” part of this. Ours is to take care of and use to the fullest all the gifts we have been given, so that our blessings may serve as a blessing to many.

I join you in praying every day for Trinity, for one another, and for the ministry we share in Christ’s name.

**WILL BRING IT TO COMPLETION BY THE DAY OF JESUS CHRIST**

(Philippians 1:6)