

# ELCIC Praise Appeal Service 2017

## Sermon

Written by ELCIC National Bishop Susan C. Johnson

### Salvation is not for sale.

Luke 15:11–32 (prodigal son)

Grace to you and peace in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. It is a delight to bring you greetings on behalf of your sisters and brothers in Christ from coast, to coast, to coast across the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada. Thank you for choosing to participate in the ELCIC Praise Appeal and for your support of the work of the wider church. The theme for this year's Praise Appeal is **Salvation—Not for Sale**. From this year until 2017 we are joining Lutherans from around the world in commemorating the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation. Liberated by God's Grace is the anniversary theme being used by the Lutheran World Federation and by our church. **Salvation—Not for Sale** is one of the three sub-themes that we are using.

**Salvation—Not for Sale** and **Liberated by God's Grace** are very closely connected. Both the theme and the subtheme acknowledge that the salvation we receive from God in baptism comes to us as a gift. It is priceless! The love that God has for us is unconditional.

This grace, this justification, this love is mind boggling. It is like nothing else that we experience. It is stronger and deeper and more faithful than any other love we receive—be it spouse, parent, child or friend.

As Lutherans we “know” this. Grace is the lens through which we view our relationship with God. We hear grace proclaimed in word and liturgy. We sing grace in our hymns. And yet I know that for many of us, claiming that amazing grace for our own is sometimes very hard to do. Grace is there for everyone else, but surely, because of my faults, my sins, my flaws, I will be judged and found lacking.

That's why this parable of the prodigal son is so important for us to hear. The younger son demands his share of the inheritance and goes out into the world to experience life. He quickly spends his money living the high life. When he discovers he is broke he also learns that his friends have deserted him. He spends some time in menial labour (think back to last year's Human Beings—Not For Sale theme!) but finally decides to go home and face the music.



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He goes home expecting anger, derision, punishment, hoping at best to be treated like a slave in his father's house. But what does he find? A joyous welcome, a warm embrace and a party to celebrate his return.

This story is our story. Every one of us has had some experience, some moment, when we have felt we have done something beyond the pale. That we have done something that has tested God's patience and love. But God is always there waiting for us with open arms. This message of love is meant for every one of us and for me too! This is why many people no longer refer to this as the parable of the prodigal son—that naming focuses the attention on us as the actor in the story. Instead, the parable is now referred to as the parable of the loving father. This places the emphasis on God's action, where it should be. The grace we receive in baptism is the result of God's action, not our own merit.

There reality is that in the world around us we hear many messages that tell us exactly the opposite. The myth of the self-made person suggests that people can find worth and salvation without God. Entire industries have been created to make us feel that can never be good enough. Not thin enough, or rich enough, or beautiful enough, or having enough of the right kind of things. That is why the message that salvation is not for sale is so important. It helps to remind us of the primacy of God in our lives, the primacy of the grace we have received in our baptism. That we do not, in fact we should not, try to earn our salvation or buy our way into looking or living like a standard our consumer culture has set for us.

I don't know about you, but this is news I need to hear again and again. It is hard for us to shut out the "chatter" of all the messages we hear around us that tell us we are not good enough. This year our national bishop is trying a daily practice to remind her of God's liberating grace. Every morning she makes the sign of the cross on her forehead and says out loud "I am baptized, I am a beloved child of God." She invites us to join her in this daily practice, as a way of reminding us of our baptisms and of the unconditional love that God has for us. As faithful people committed to living out our discipleship as those who have been liberated by God's grace, we know that with God we will be blessed and that with God's help we will be a blessing to others.

Through your gift to the Praise Appeal you join with the whole creation in praising God! You are a blessing as you help the ELCIC National Church live out this call through:

- Our partnerships with KAIROS and the Anglican Church of Canada as we work in the areas of homelessness and affordable housing and responsible resource extraction;



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- Our partnership with The Lutheran World Federation and Canadian Lutheran World Relief as we work to support refugees around the world;
- Our partnership with churches in Argentina and Peru as we help support ministry in indigenous communities within these churches.
- Continuing the Call to Spiritual Renewal, working to deepen the discipleship of all our members and learning new ways to reach out in faith to those around us;
- Building better relationships with other denominations and faiths here in Canada, through the Canadian Council of Churches, and around the world through the World Council of Churches.

Individuals and congregations are encouraged to generously support the 2017 ELCIC Praise Appeal, which is a significant source of revenue for the ELCIC.

Thank you for your commitment to deepening your discipleship and being spiritually renewed. Thank you for the ways your work to live out the freedom we have received through Christ. Thank you for your support of our collective work in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada. Thank you for your support and participation in this Praise Appeal. May God bless and strengthen your ministry both individually and together.

