

Thank you for coming this evening. My name is Ryan Wunningham, I am blessed to be the pastor of Zion Lutheran Church on 32<sup>nd</sup> and Pine. The past year, Zion Lutheran Church celebrated its 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Our history in Holland goes back to the 1880's to a German **Catholic** by the name of **Anton Seif**, who owned and operated the Holland City Brewery.

His wife, **Frederika Anna Seif**, however, was **Lutheran**. Anton faithfully attended mass here at the Catholic church, yet Anna held her faith dear, and had no place to worship. At first, she gathered other German Lutherans and would meet somewhere (YMCA bldg., others) to sing and pray, and sometimes have a visiting pastor celebrate the Lord's Supper.

Anton saw the deep faith in his wife, and gave her a gift. He bought a plot on the Southwest corner of Maple and 12<sup>th</sup> streets, just down the block from his church, and built a small Lutheran church for his wife to worship in.

Yes, that means my church, Zion Lutheran Church, was first built by a Catholic. And, today, we are gathered in this Catholic Church at the corner of Maple and 12<sup>th</sup> streets. The original Zion sanctuary was right outside this wall (left) where St. Francis' bell tower stands. Zion worshipped there until 1954, when we moved to our current location. I still know people who were baptized at Zion Lutheran Church on this property.

I love this story of our history b/c it shows me what Christian unity looks like in action.

Anton and Anna Seif shared a house, a bed, and a family, but still held their distinct Christian beliefs deeply. And, I know this seems extreme to some of you, but they held their distinct Christian beliefs so dear that they didn't share the sacrament or a sanctuary. Yet, they were both baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, they both confessed the Creeds of the church, and they shared the same Christian faith.

Furthermore, a husband loved his wife so much, that rather than force her hand to give up what she held dear and try to make her change some beliefs and become Catholic, he honored her faith. He blessed her faith. And he bought a plot down the street from his church, and built a church for her. You might look at 2 churches on the same street in this city and say "that looks like division," but I think it looks like real, live, baptismal Christian unity where we hold hands as brothers and sisters in Jesus, yet still honor and respect our deeply held differences. We can be one body in Christ, but still wholeheartedly believe our particular confessions.

The Apostle Paul wrote this to the Christians in Rome in Romans 12:

*<sup>4</sup> For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, <sup>5</sup> so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. <sup>6</sup> We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. Prophecy, serve, teach, encourage, give, lead...*

I want to focus on verse 5 →...*in Christ, we, though many, form 1 body, & each member **belongs** to all the others*

Paul is writing to the Roman church. But he's not just talking to them. He's talking to all Christians, to us.

**You belong** to all who confess Christ, repent of their sins and believe the Gospel that Jesus lived, died, and rose for you. Yes, you belong to the people of your church; but you also belong to the people of Christ's church, in every continent, culture, and corner. I belong to you.

I want you to **look** at someone next to you. Look them in the **eye** and **say**, "**I belong to you.**" Now, look at someone else you don't know...in the eye, and say, "I belong to you."

**Belonging** – that brings me to a main theme for this service: **Justice**. Justice – the right things going to the right people in the right way. Justice is about belonging. I think the heart of Christians talking about Justice is looking each other in the eye and saying, "I belong to you." If you are baptized into Christ and confess saving faith in the Triune God, I belong to YOU. Justice says, "I belong to you. I want to use my gifts, my resources, my faith, whatever God has given me to work for your good."

Injustice begins when we get belonging backwards. Injustice begins with "You belong to me." Exploitation, racism, discrimination all begin when we say, "You belong to me. I can use you, and misuse you. But for we who are in Christ...we are one body, and each member belongs to all the others. I belong to you.

**Martin Luther King, Jr.**, whose life and work are commemorated tomorrow, wrote his "Letter From Birmingham Jail" to other pastors who opposed his civil disobedience. And page after page of theological discussion and eloquence, in which he quotes Augustine and Aquinas, King essentially is trying to plead with fellow clergy, saying (my paraphrase), "We're Christians. We belong to each other. Please act like we belong to each other."

If you, and me, and all who trust in the mercy and grace of the crucified and risen Jesus looked every Christian in the eye and said, “I belong to you,” justice would happen.

I’ve been dancing around this, but I want to go there directly. Why are we one body? Why are we one in Christ? What unites us? What makes us one?

We looked at Romans 12, but our unity is declared earlier in Romans 6.

*<sup>3</sup> Or don’t you know that all of us who were **baptized** into Christ Jesus were **baptized** into his death? <sup>4</sup> We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.*

*<sup>5</sup> For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his.*

We all were baptized into Christ Jesus...we were buried with him in baptism...united to Jesus in his crucifixion, and united to him in his resurrection.

**“I belong to you, because I belong to Jesus.”**

**“I belong to you, because I belong to Jesus.”** Now look at someone you don’t know, and say, **“I belong to you because I belong to Jesus.”**

So, as we leave here today, go to our separate homes. And tomorrow we will all go to separate workplaces, volunteer places, or errands. And next Sunday, as we gather in our separate churches, with distinct confessions and customs, **“I still belong to you, because I belong to Jesus.”**

With thanksgiving I remember **Anton** and **Anna Seif**, who both worshipped on this property in both unity and diversity, and showed us what Christian unity can look like. They teach me that **“I belong to you because I belong to Jesus.”**

For the sake of the church of Jesus, wherever it is found around the world, **“I belong to you, because I belong to Jesus.”**

For the good of our world and our community, that needs to see Christians acting justly, generously and kindly, **“I belong to you, because I belong to Jesus.”**

Amen.