**The Living Traditions of the Dead**

**25th Anniversary of the ELCA**

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Our new bishop Elizabeth Eaton is quite a change from what we’ve had - obviously she’s a woman - that’s not what I meant - she has actual black hair, as opposed to the gray and white of our former bishops - but that’s not it either. The change is that she’s said a few really weird things.

Now, weird is good. Think of our new pope Francis, who must have sent many catholics into contortions when he said about homosexual priests, ‘who am I to judge?’ You get the idea we now have a fun pope, as opposed to old Benedict, don’t you? Well, I’m thinking we have a fun presiding bishop.

She said, There are many people who consider themselves spiritual but not religious. I guess I’m religious but not spiritual.

My first thought was, O no, a presiding bishop who’s not spiritual. But then I thought, after a while I began to understand, you know, I’m not really that spiritual either. I’m just not. Plenty religious, sure, but not so much the other.

And so I call it Good News when I discover that in Hebrew there is no word for ‘spiritual’ no adjective for someone more ‘in tune’ with Godly stuff than others. The New Testament doesn’t use the word much either, except in odd places: Consider

NRSV: I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters,**[**[**a**](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=romans%2012.1&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-28232a)**]** by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual**[**[**b**](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=romans%2012.1&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-28232b)**]** worship.

AV 1611: I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, *which is* your reasonable service.

τὴν λογικὴν λατρείαν ὑμῶν·

One of my favorite bible teachers is Rob Bell, whose first tour video - he’s a bible teacher who goes on tour, and has videos - he’s quite the hipster: it’s Called Everything is Spiritual.  Because Everything is spiritual - all creation is connected somehow to the creative Spirit of God, so…

And because I’m not Spiritual, necessarily, I am happy to be a Lutheran, and especially happy to be part of Good Shepherd here, because we do think differently here, and it’s for the best. Let me show you:

Lutherans have two wonderful traditions that we cherish - the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

We celebrate baptism and we insist that it changes lives. But we’ve no proof. In fact, whatever empirical evidence we can gather more or less points to the opposite - that baptism predicts nothing about the spiritual future of the baptized. We take it on faith.

We celebrate the Lord’s Supper, but there’s no proof taking communion makes you a better person. Again, empirical evidence would seem to indicate it makes no difference at all. Saint and sinner come to the altar, and saint and sinner depart. Doesn’t seem to change anything. We take it on faith.

Most of the things we do in worship are taken on faith - except this one thing. This one Logike latreia…

Jesus said this:

The greatest commandment is this: Love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself.

Upon these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

Upon these two hang all the law and the prophets. For those of you unfamiliar with your bibles, with the Old Testament, the Law and the Prophets are the lion’s share of that very much larger portion of your bible, and all those words, all those books, all those spiritual, religious rituals, traditions, beliefs, practices, whatever, they all depend on these two commands: Love God, and love your neighbor as yourself.

Why is that so important? Well, for me it’s important because beloved, loving your neighbor is NOT spiritual. Not one bit. It’s either practical, material, worldly, or it’s not worth spit. Jesus doesn’t ask us to pray for our neighbors, Jesus asks us to go and help our neighbors. And THAT’s what we do here - what we’re doing today.

And consider: John 3.16 Why did God our Father send Jesus his son into the world? Because God so loved the world.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son…

Look, if more people received Holy Communion on Sunday, would it make the world God so loved a better place? I hope so, but I couldn’t make any promises.

If more people were baptized, if rivers and lakes were clogged with white robbed saints singing Yes we’ll gather at the river, would the world become a better place? I hope so, but I’ve no evidence that it would.

But if, by chance, by some miracle, folks loved their neighbor, if say, even one lone Christian, one Pagan, one Muslim, one Atheist, one agnostic person today, loved their neighbor as themselves - in some real, concrete way, then the world’s a better place for it. Just one person, just one neighbor, just one act of love.

Lutherans have known this from the beginning, and thank God for it. So we’ll baptize infants, hoping against hope those waters and the word of God will give them grace and power to change the world for the better.    
We’ll come to this table, every week we’ll come, because we trust that the promise of God, the invisible body and blood of Jesus will change, strengthen and empower us, make us better than we were.

But most of all, most of all, we’ll love God, and love our neighbor as ourselves, because as spiritual as we may be, we live in a material world, a physical world, and we live with neighbors who suffer material, physical troubles. And when we love our neighbors in real, material, physical, measurable ways, we make the world, the world God so loved, the world Jesus came to save, we make it a better place.

That’s why we’re here. That’s why the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is here. That’s why the Christian church in all its various flavors and forms is here. That’s why Jesus is here - why the Spirit is here, why we gather here together. So let’s go change the world God so loves.