***WE WANT OUR FAITH TO MATTER!***

***(Lord, when did we see you with malaria?)***

*Adapted from a sermon by Pastor Henry Zorn*

 This year over 7000 Boomers will turn 65 each day. Over 7000 adults can ‘legally’ retire, collect Medicare, maybe take stock of their lives for the first time. The question on the minds of many 60 some- things is “Does my life have meaning? “Will I be remembered three generations from now?” Boomers aren’t alone; the millennial generation – those young adults between 18 and 30 now are more interested in making a difference than making a dollar. Aren’t most of us in search of the answer to the question, “How will my life be meaningful?”

 When I first heard about the ELCA Malaria Campaign, I got excited. Why? Because it is *meaningful* ministry for congregations! I know that many of you choose to be members of this congregation because we do meaningful ministry. You can find meaning and importance for living out your faith through this community!

 Back in the summer of 2009, at the Churchwide Assembly Andrea DeGroot-Nesdahl first introduced the malaria ministry. Andrea was the first female Bishop in the ELCA. Because of term limits, she had to find an “LAB” life after Bishop. She is directing the Malaria Campaign for our Church. In her presentation, she said that pilot synods will “build the bridge as we walk over it.” Pilot synods get to do the *meaningful work* of inventing a malaria ministry for the ELCA! *“We,” the Southern Ohio Synod, are a Pilot Synod. We are ‘building the bridge’ for the rest of the ELCA. “We,” ––––––––––––– are doing that*! This service, this weekend is among the first ever worship services looking at the disease of malaria and the malaria campaign of the ELCA.

Some congregations in the Southern Ohio Synod have done ELCA Malaria Campaign related ministry with their Vacation Bible School programs last summer; more are making plans to lift up the Malaria Campaign focus this year. Some congregations are collecting nickels for nets, or are holding ‘hoops for nets’ basketball shooting contests as ways to build the bridge as we walk on it...a bridge that the entire ELCA will walk over the next four years as we work toward the goal of raising 15 million dollars! Imagine in the year 2014 or 2015, when ELCA announces that it has achieved its fundraising goal of $15 million! Imagine how it will feel to know that we helped “build the bridge!” Imagine celebrating the news that deaths from malaria have fallen – fallen from about a million a year, mainly pregnant women and children – malaria deaths have fallen to none.

 Why the ELCA Malaria Campaign? Let’s look at today’s Bible readings. One of the resources says about today’s gospel, “*this is a call to an obedience that is not prescription or law or sacrifice but joyful living in mercy without calculation. This joyful living takes believers to an unexpected place. It takes them to the cross; it takes them to the cross in human lives, to the cross in the life of family, community, society, nation, and world. It takes them to the place of God's suffering in the world.”[[1]](#footnote--1)*

There is a color pamphlet about Lutheran Malaria Initiative in your worship folder today. It shows photographs of children in Africa. The message is that malaria cuts short the hopes, dreams and lives of children before they can be fulfilled. Can we hear those crying out from the African continent?. Can we hear the weakest in the Body of Christ? Can we hear Christ calling out in the sick?

 There are many organizations that are working to prevent and treat malaria. Many of them do it out of humanitarian concern. But we do it because it is *God’s will!* Malaria is not the “disease du jour” in the ELCA. It’s not one that came along today and will be gone tomorrow. Malaria is a disease of poverty and it is closely woven with world hunger. Fighting hunger, promoting health, and being compassionate toward “the weakest in the body”, toward our neighbor who is sick - these are the very DNA of what it means to be Lutheran. We are free! We already justified with God in Christ! We are free; free to love and serve our neighbor!

 Where will your contributions to the ELCA Malaria Campaign go? 90% will go to our partners who are already on the ground in sub-Saharan Africa, already doing God’s will!. For example, dollars will go to our partner synod and partner churches in the East of Lake Victoria diocese in Tanzania. We are not inventing the wheel. We are supporting partners who need funding to do the work. The ELCA Malaria Campaign is a comprehensive approach; it works to prevent malaria with bed nets, water treatment and education about the disease and it works to treat the disease with medicine, clinics and funding doctors and nurses.

 I want to close by sharing the reasons that I am so excited about the ELCA Malaria Campaign. First, it is meaningful. We are *doing* ministry! That is one reason why you are a member of this church. Doing ministry as a disciple of Christ can and does give your life meaning!

 Why the ELCA Malaria Campaign? Because malaria is “stupid!” It is easily preventable and treatable. We are not talking about curing cancer here! $10 for a mosquito net saves a family!

 Why the ELCA Malaria Campaign? Today’s Bible readings say enough, but let me add one more from James Chapter Two, “If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill.’ And yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that?”

 Why the ELCA Malaria Campaign? Let me share the most compelling reason for me. As a parent, as a mother, I do all I can to protect and care for my children – even as they’ve grown to young adult hood. I remember back just a couple years ago, when Pete and I were out of country and K ruptured her appendix. I remember the moments of fear and a sense of helplessness; a parent’s worse nightmare. K was hospitalized, was in great pain, but was able to recover with proper medical treatment. I think about parents in Africa, holding their children in their arms as they are dying from malaria. I think of their pain and their helplessness and maybe their frustration knowing that it could be prevented and treated. *How can I, another parent, not help*?...

 Lord, when did we see you? When I was hungry and you fed me. When I was thirsty and you gave me drink. When I was in prison and you visited me. When I was threatened by malaria and you gave me a bed net and taught me how to prevent it! “Alleluia! Christ is risen! Through Christ’s resurrection, we have a new birth, a living hope, and an opportunity to be Christ that shines into the darkness called malaria that threatens the lives of our brothers and sisters in Africa. “Let your light so shine before others that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”

Amen.

1. ##  Commentary on Gospel by [Dirk G. Lange](http://www.workingpreacher.org/contributor_detail.aspx?author_id=98), workingpreacher.com

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