

Greetings to you this Sunday, from the campus ministries of the Eastern North Dakota Synod of the ELCA.

We have two of them:

Crossroads Lutheran Campus Ministry at NDSU in Fargo
and

Christus Rex Lutheran Campus Ministry at UND in Grand Forks.

This Campus Ministry Sunday, is a day to celebrate this particular ministry of the church,

these young adults who are growing in faith and life as they pursue their educational goals.

I'm Kathy Fick, the Campus Minister at UND

My colleague here at UND is Chad Brucklacher,

and our colleague at NDSU is Kim Adams.

Together we serve on behalf of our synod at our long-standing
Lutheran Campus Ministries.

Thank you for your care and support of these ministries.

Thank you for your prayers of encouragement and words of hope for the staff of these ministries.

Thank you for giving us this time in your church today to share our story of your ministries on campus and how God Spirit is at work with young adults today.

And so, we begin, as we always do,

Grace and peace to you from God,

who is

and was

and is to come. AMEN.

Today, I want to tell you the story of Shelly.

A young woman from North Dakota who came to UND to become a doctor.

She was active in her sorority, a standout hard science major, and a prime candidate for med schools around the country.

One week, she came to us and told us that she had never been confirmed, because her family had relocated and she fell through the cracks with the timing of her confirmation.

"Could I be confirmed here, in this campus ministry?" she asked.

Of course, we told her. Confirmation, and even baptisms, are certainly a part of campus ministry. There are plenty of

college students who have never been confirmed and many who have never been baptized.

And that was the beginning of something quite remarkable in Shelly's life.

As she studied and learned and grew in faith in her preparation for her Affirmation of Baptism, her confirmation, Shelly discovered that she had many questions and a deep interest and curiosity of faith.

She deepened her involvement, took on leadership roles in the campus ministry, and came one day to talk about changing her vocational plans.

In her journey of faith and life in this campus ministry, this budding young physician, had become a budding young seminarian.

Shelly wanted to be a pastor instead.

That was a tough adjustment for her dad.

"Are you sure?" came the question from many people.

Shelly was sure.

She was an outstanding seminarian and is a wonderful pastor.

She and her husband formed a non-profit to assist young children from Haiti in their education, and they are committed

to living out the call they hear to bring God's justice to bear in this world.

Shelly's simple encounter with the Lutheran Campus Ministry at UND changed not only her life, but the lives of hundreds of others with whom she has worked. She has been the epitome of the welcome Jesus' offers in today's Gospel.

The transforming call of God in our Lutheran Campus Ministries has brought about thousands of stories of the Spirit's work in our midst.

Stories of young adults who have written off the church and faith and God, but with an encounter with the radical welcome and grace of God in a campus ministry community, they find a place for faith once again.

Stories of young people who were suicidal and found a safe place to dare to live again in the staff and students of Lutheran Campus Ministry.

Students who thought they were so far outside the welcome of the church because of their sexual orientation, who learned through Lutheran Campus Ministry that the love of God includes them.

Stories of the Christian witness of love with Muslim students and Jewish students and agnostic and atheist students.

This radical welcome of Jesus makes room for everyone. And the ministries of Christus Rex at UND and Crossroads at NDSU live that truth every day.

And that radical hospitality of grace is transforming lives. Over. And over. Again.

It's at the heart of today's Gospel.

The story of Jesus welcome of the children.

The story of Jesus, once again, drawing the circle of love wider.

The story of blessing offered to the very least in society.

If the center of things revolved around holy men,

And the next circle included business men and men who tilled the land and tended the livestock,

Then the next circle took in the tax collectors and folks who were part of the house of Israel, but whose lives kept them on the edge.

Next the unclean men.

And the Gentile men.

And then way out here we get to the women. The women, who were simply the property of the men.

They had no status of their own.

Finally, on the outer ring, the children.

They were nothing

They had no rights of their own.

Unless they were the one male heir, they had no place, no importance at all.

Frankly, children were a drain on the family, the culture, the economic stability until they could become workers.

Even slaves had more value than children.

Is it any wonder, then, that the disciples were wanting them out of the way?

They had been conditioned to see children as an annoyance, An interruption, or just plain nothing.

But the mothers, the women, who knew what it was to be outside, who knew what it was to be property and nothing more, saw in Jesus a welcome, inclusion, a radical embodiment of God's grace.

And so, they brought their children to Jesus for a blessing.

"Is there room here for us too?" was the implicit question.

And the disciples, the gatekeepers, the faithful followers, were quick to reprimand, to chastise, to push away the women and children.

But Jesus would have none of it.

Jesus, in fact, Mark says, was indignant.

"This is what God's reign is about!" he told his disciples.

These children are what it looks like to be my follower.

And he went beyond simple advocacy for children.

He included them, called them from outside to inside the circle, offered children that radical welcome of grace,

And then...

Then, Jesus BLESSED them.

He didn't just stand up for them.

He blessed them.

Named them the greatest in God's reign come to earth.

The questions, the uncertainty, the dependence, the needs that children bring to life,

All embraced by Jesus as good.

All blessed by Jesus.

All included, welcomed by Jesus.

This, this is the reign of God, come to earth.

This is the call of the church of Christ in the world, people of God.

This radical welcome, without exclusion.

This unwavering offering of God's unconditional grace.

This inclusion of even the one most outside the circle.

The reminder that the young can be the greatest witness.

It's not surprising that this text would resonate for us as we talk about campus ministry.

Students, with their questions and their doubts and their insecurities and their unfolding journeys of faith, often feel so far outside the church that they can't imagine a welcome, let alone a blessing.

But the church is there on campus, following Jesus' lead.

Lifting up this call of Jesus to welcome all.

This is the witness the church makes on the campuses of UND and NDSU.

This is the proclamation, Sunday after Sunday.

This is the welcome made to all people, without exception.

The campus ministries, the followers of Jesus at Christus Rex and Crossroads,

follow Jesus' lead.

We offer advocacy for the outsider, as Jesus did.

But we don't stop there.

We stand as allies with Jesus.

And we also welcome, include, everyone in God's love.

And then, with Jesus, we move to the radical behavior of blessing those most outside.

We do it because it is what Jesus tells us to do.

It is the way we live and love.

That's the ministry you see and know as the church is present on these two campuses.

That is the call of the whole people of God, in partnership together.

With your support of Lutheran Campus Ministry, this is the witness you make as the people of God on those campuses.

Sometimes, we find a Shelly who becomes your pastor.

Sometimes we find a social worker who does his life differently because he encountered grace at a campus ministry.

Sometimes we meet a banker who knows the stewardship of gifts is impacted by his life as a follower of Jesus, because they heard that word in college.

Sometimes, your own child is brought from the outside to the center of grace because of an encounter with campus ministry.

Sometimes your own life has been transformed by your time in a Lutheran Campus Ministry.

The followers of Jesus at our Lutheran Campus Ministry make a witness this day in our synod.

A witness of Jesus' call to reach out and bless even those most outside our cultural imaginings of what it means to be the body of Christ.

This, Jesus tell us, this is what the kingdom, the reign, of God is.

Your partnership with Lutheran Campus Ministries is one of your own answers to today's call from Jesus to welcome all.

Thank you for your care, your prayers and your financial support.

Thank you for bearing witness to this welcome in your own congregation.

Thank you for lifting up the witness of the followers of Jesus at UND and NDSU.

God's grace invites us all to lives of radical welcome and blessing as we follow Jesus,
as we hear the call to BE LOVE.

AMEN.

