



Queen Anne

LUTHERAN CHURCH

Called to Proclaim God's Love in Christ for Every Person

2400 Eighth Avenue West • Seattle, Washington 98119

Mailing: P.O. Box 17029 • Seattle, WA 98127

206.284.1960 • www.queenannelutheran.org

✦ *Staff* ✦

Pastor	The Rev. Dr. Dan Peterson
Cantor	Kyle Haugen
Children's Ministry Coordinator	Terry Anderson
Parish Administrator	Barbara Bash
Sexton	John Bryant

✦ *In Worship Today* ✦

Pastor	The Rev. Dr. Dan Peterson
Guest Preacher	Gabe Brannan
Cantor	Kyle Haugen

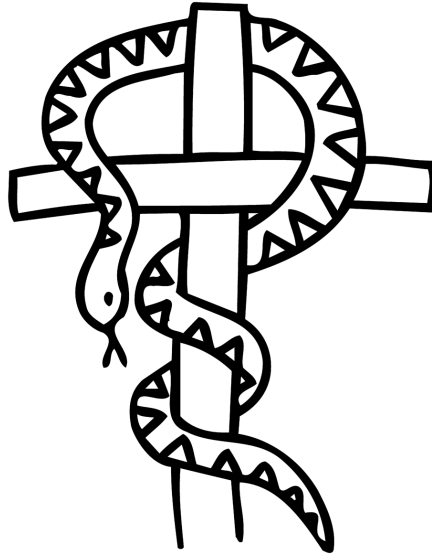
We welcome Gabe Brannan to the pulpit today. Gabe serves the ELCA Churchwide Office as Mission Funding Director for the ELCA by working with those— individuals, families, and congregations— who help support our ministries of hunger, leadership and global partnerships with our siblings in Christ.

This service of worship can also be heard as audio online. Go to queenannelutheran.org and click on "WORD OUT" to find audio, video, and print resources for worship at home.

FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

September 13, 2020

"Word Out #28 audio transcript



Prelude

Fanfare
Healey Willan (1880-1968)

Welcome

- P:** Welcome, this fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost. Wherever you are listening, however you may be struggling, we invite you into this space: one where you can hear the good news in proclamation, spoken and sung; a time where you can be still and know God is God.
Our guest preacher today is Gabe Brannan of ELCA Churchwide.

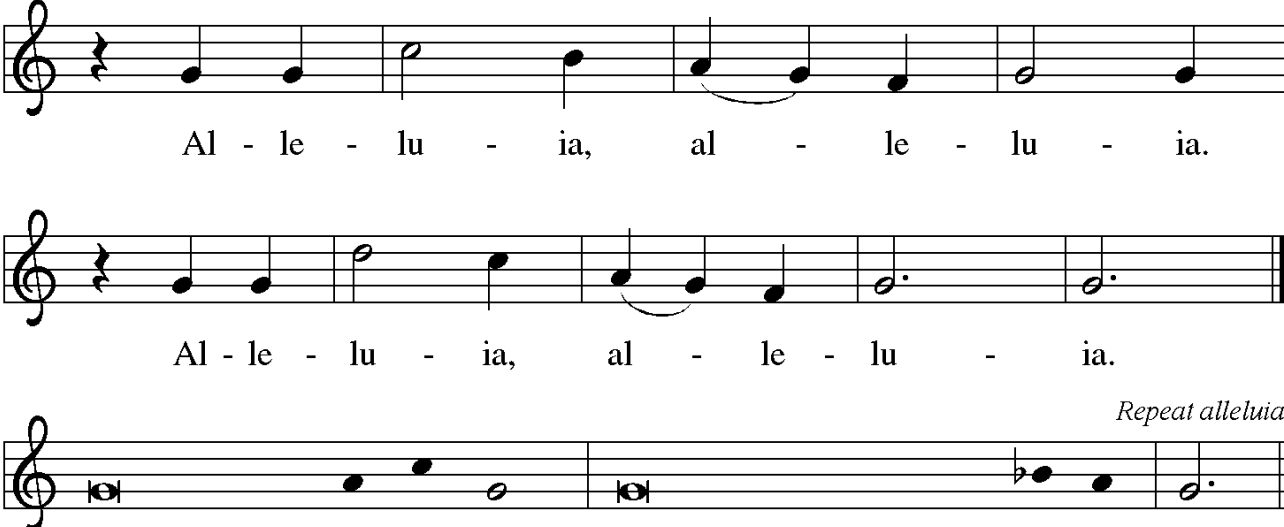
Greeting

- P:** The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.
G: And also with you.

Gospel Acclamation

1 John 2:1,12

G:



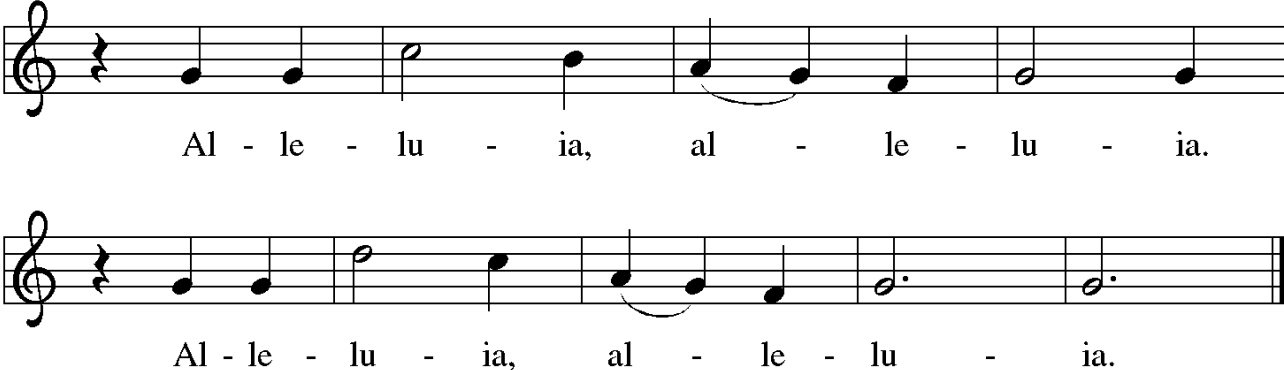
Al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia.

Al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia.

Repeat alleluia

P: We have an advocate, Jesus Christ the righteous;
your sins are forgiven on account of his name.

G:



Al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia.

Al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia.

The Holy Gospel:

John 3:13-17

P: A reading from John.

G: **Glory to you, O Lord.**

P: ¹³No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.

¹⁴And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, ¹⁵so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

¹⁶For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

¹⁷Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

P: This is the Word of God.

G: **Praise to you, O Christ.**

Sermon

He Came to Jesus at Night
Gabe Brannan

Gracious God of healing and hope ...

Thank you for the chance to gather in your Word and light – even if now oddly and virtually – so that your message of Grace can continue to shine throughout the world. We ask that you show us ways to live your Word in the world and remind us that your Word is a call to action not simply a reporting of the past. We pray and ask this in Jesus' name. *Amen.*

He came to Jesus at night

Nicodemus came to Jesus at night. It was risky. As a Pharisee, Nicodemus knew what he was supposed to think of Jesus: Jesus was a rabble-rouser, Jesus broke the sabbath, Jesus drove people and sheep and cattle out of the temple with a whip of cords. This was not the behavior of a good, lawful Jewish boy. But then there were the other stories – like the wedding at Cana where people say he turned jars of water into jars of wine – and the testimony of John the Baptist who said Jesus is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit. So under the cover of night, so as not to be seen, Nicodemus comes to Jesus and greets him:

“Rabbi, (he said) we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.”

This is how John 3 opens. In today's reading, it is Nicodemus that Jesus is speaking with. From the Bible, we don't know a lot about Nicodemus, he only appears on three occasions and all in the Gospel of John, but we can fill in the blanks with some color from what we do know about him. We know that Nicodemus was a man of some repute and respect. We know he was a man of wealth and power. I think we also know that Nicodemus was conflicted; otherwise he wouldn't have been there, otherwise he wouldn't have risked so much and sought after Jesus under the refuge of night.

Nicodemus' conflict, I think, comes from the pull between his need to be faithful to the values and duties as a Pharisee – a member of the Jewish ruling council – and the God that Jesus was walking and bringing into the world. Are these the same God? Can they be? If what Jesus says is right – if God really is with him – does that make Nicodemus, and the rest of the Pharisee, *wrong*?

What follows in John 3 is a conversation between two devout men of God. In Nicodemus we find a highly educated man and a politician in the community looking for answers. In Jesus, we find the answers, though sometimes complicated to understand. John 3 is the chapter one Baptist preacher said he would “read to a dying man who did not know the gospel, as the most suitable one for such an occasion.”

It makes sense, then, that one of the most widely-quoted and well-known verses in our lifetime comes from this exchange. John 3:16 has been called the “Gospel in a nutshell” and along with, I think, the beatitudes, is the clearest explanation of who we are as a people who live in the light of God:

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”

John 3 ends with Jesus telling Nicodemus:

“For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.”

Brief Introduction

Before I get too far into today's sermon, I want to say hello and good morning (or whatever time of day you find yourself listening to this) from the ELCA Churchwide Office. I'm Gabe Brannan – I have had the chance to join you for worship on a couple of occasions in the past – and I am speaking today about John 3 on behalf of ELCA World Hunger.

On behalf of Bishop Elizabeth Eaton, I want to say THANK YOU! to everyone at Queen Anne for your continued support of both your local ministries as well as ELCA ministries like World Hunger, Global Mission and Disaster Relief. From my times here in the past, I believe Queen Anne is living what it means to be Lutheran in today's world.

And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness

Back to the Gospel, the next time we see Nicodemus is in John 7. He is still a Pharisee and a member of the Sanhedrin – the highest court and council in Jerusalem at the time – and it is Nicodemus who steps in to remind his colleagues that Jewish law requires that Jesus be heard before he is judged: “Our law, (he said) does not judge people without first giving them a hearing to find out what they are doing, does it?”

Nicodemus's defense of Jesus – or the intercession Nicodemus makes on Jesus' behalf – marks remarkably close to why Nicodemus first went to visit with Jesus in John 3 – he asks those set out to judge to *find out what Jesus was doing*.

In the chapters since Nicodemus last saw Jesus, Jesus had performed miracles of healing and feeding. The ministry of this charismatic Galilean had grown from a hum to a roar and that's the exact reason for Nicodemus and Jesus' paths to be crossing again. Nicodemus, though, still didn't understand what it was Jesus had tried to tell him in their conversation in John 3.

As popular and quotable as it is, I don't think it was John 3:16 that was left rattling around Nicodemus' brain when he and Jesus part ways at the end of John 3, though. Remember what we know about Nicodemus – as a member

of the Sanhedrin, Nicodemus was charged with upholding Jewish law and he would have needed to know not only the laws but the roots of those laws as if he had written them himself. So while the full impact and meaning of John 3:16 had not revealed itself yet, I think it was John 3:14 that hit Nicodemus right between the eyes:

Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up.

Why is Jesus bringing Nicodemus back to our first reading today – Numbers 21 – with Moses and the serpent? Not to show off his knowledge of Jewish law. Not to show the right in his righteousness. Not to trick Nicodemus or to prove to him that he is somehow *wrong*. I think Jesus refers back to Moses and the poisonous serpent for a couple of reasons.

The first is a very literal interpretation. Just like Moses lifted up a bronze snake onto a pole for *everyone who is bitten shall look at it and live*, Jesus is telling Nicodemus that soon it will be Jesus who is lifted up – though Jesus on a cross, not a pole – so that everyone may have eternal life.

Jesus, I think, was also trying to tell Nicodemus that it is God's promise that He is there to help us fight against the serpents of the world – first through Moses in the wilderness, then again through Jesus and giving his only Son to the world *so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life*.

Indeed, (we read in today's Gospel) God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

COVID-19: The serpent of the world

In today's world, there are a lot of snakes to choose from – and I'm not even thinking of politics or politicians – but I think it's fair to call COVID-19 the serpent of today's world. As I write this, we have seen 27.6 million confirmed cases worldwide with nearly 900,000 deaths. Here in the United States, over 6.4 million cases and 190,000 dead. If we want to measure it another way – though not compare the two types of losses – the UN believes the slowdown to the global economy caused by the coronavirus outbreak is likely to cost at least \$1-trillion.

These aren't just numbers, though. I worry when we focus on numbers and statistics and polling and seven-day-rolling-averages and positivity-rates. I worry when we forget the *humanity* that is attached to each number. Each number tolled is a person whose life is lost; each number counted is a family and community deeply and forever impacted. I think of it this way: if I were to try to say the name of each of the 193,025 lives lost in the United States as I write this, if I could keep up the impossible pace of a name a second, it would take me nearly two-and-a-quarter days to recite the list. And that's just here in the United States. Keeping the same pace, it would take me over 10 days to say the names of our siblings in Christ who have lost their lives globally.

COVID-19 is the serpent of the world.

So must the Son of Man be lifted up

So what do we do? How do we respond? Jesus tells us today that God did not send his only son into the world to condemn it but to save it. That He is here to fight the serpents. That—

“God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”

The truth, though, is that even before this crisis hunger was on the rise. The truth is that the pandemic could almost double acute food insecurity by the end of this year; in the coming months, as many as 265 million people could suffer hunger extreme enough to endanger their lives or livelihoods. The truth is, more mothers of young children in the United States are reporting food insecurity than ever before. The truth is, people are facing impossible choices, risking infection because of hunger, violence or lack of income.

In the face of all of this— as the serpent of the world slithers through spring and summer and into our fall— what do we do? How do we respond?

We do what Jesus tells us to do, what he tells Nicodemus:

Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up.

We do what Jesus tells us to do. We do what Moses shows us how to do. We pick up snakes. We pick up snakes especially for those who find themselves in the wilderness where there is no food and no water.

We lift Jesus up not on a literal cross but through living out his teachings in our actions.

Our church – through ELCA World Hunger – has walked alongside our partners as they fight the serpents of their communities. For more than 45 years, this work has included health care, food security, sustainable agriculture, protection for migrant groups, education, financial training, women’s empowerment and political advocacy. It is our church’s aim to get to the root causes of hunger and poverty and to, one day, find a just world where all are fed.

ELCA World Hunger has traveled alongside our partners throughout this pandemic. Like the congregations of the ELCA, our normal routines have shifted but our doors and work have never closed. We continue to deliver services to the people who rely on them.

I want to extend an invitation, today. I want to invite you all to listen in on a conversation in a couple of weeks about what our church is doing to pick up snakes. It’s an online Zoom meeting – which, honestly, at this point, it’s hard to believe there was a time before Zoom meetings – and I will give you a link in a moment. This conversation, which we are calling *Hunger in the Time of COVID-19: Life for Today and Hope for Tomorrow*, will center on a conversation between the Presiding Bishop, Elizabeth Eaton, along with the Bishop of the Northwest Washington Synod, Bishop Shelly Bryan Wee, and author and advocate Rick Steves, and is a chance to hear about how the ELCA is responding during this pandemic.

You can find all of the information out – including how to register – at: elca.org/hungerfundraiser. The event is Thursday, September 24 at 5 o’clock, Seattle time. This is the second of these types of Zoom events we have done and what I appreciated about the message coming out of the first one is that our church is faithfully responding to this crisis with a voice of hope and a commitment to be standing in the world.

Once again, that's elca.org/hungerfundraiser.

Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night

The final time Nicodemus appears in the Gospel of John is at the end of John 19:

Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jewish leaders. With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body away. He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs.

I wonder if in that moment, as he and Joseph of Arimathea carried Jesus' body down Golgotha, Nicodemus – the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night – remembered Jesus' words to him:

Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up.

I wonder what Nicodemus thought about as he and Joseph carried the dead body and weight of Jesus down a hill before wrapping him in linen. I wonder if in what must have been a very heavy and human moment Nicodemus yet understood:

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."

Wake Nicodemus!

Eighteen-hundred-some-years-later, Nicodemus became a model of hope to freed southern slaves. Post-Civil War, for so many born into a world of serpents, the conversation between Nicodemus and Jesus in John 3, and the rebirth of Nicodemus into the light of Jesus, shined towards a hope for a rebirth in their own lives and for their own communities.

Wake Nicodemus! is a poem written at that time by Henry Clary Work. Work was an active abolitionist and his family's home was a stop on the Underground Railroad, for which his father was imprisoned. It is a poem

about rebirth and serpents; it is a poem about the vulnerable and marginalized. It is a poem that connects with what John tells us today – that God gave his Son to the world and because of that love and light we can find our way out of the wilderness; it is through of that love and light we are called to fight the serpents of the world.

The poem begins:

*Nicodemus, the slave was of African birth,
And was bought for a bagful of gold;
He was reckon'd as part of the salt of the earth,
But he died years ago, very old.
'Twas his last sad request as we laid him away
In the trunk of an old hollow tree;
"Wake me up!" was his charge, "at the first break of day --
Wake me up for the great Jubilee!"*

There are a few verses about the life and vigor of Nicodemus before the poem ends with a stanza, and a couple of lines, that shines towards a hope and world where serpents and hunger are lifted up and off of those stuck in the wilderness:

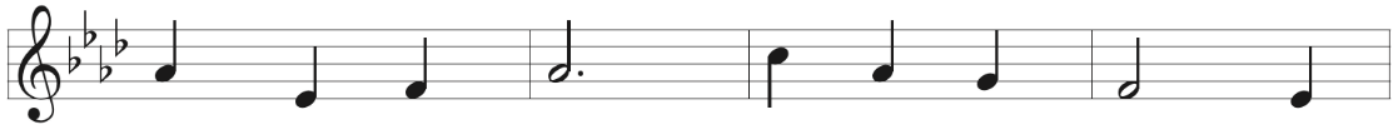
*'Twas a long weary night -- we were almost in fear
That the future was more than he knew;
'Twas a long weary night -- but the morning is near,
And the words of our prophet are true.
There are signs in the sky that the darkness is gone --
There are tokens in endless array;
While the storm which had seemingly banished the dawn,
Only hastens the advent of day.*

Closing Prayer

Gracious God, thank you again for a chance to share in your Word and light. Remind us today that while storms and serpents will always be a part of our world, so too is your light in grace. We pray in your name. *Amen.*

Hymn of the Day

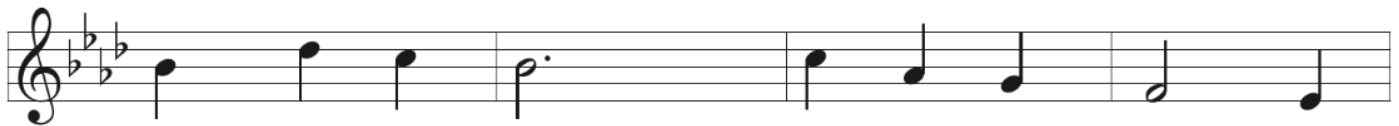
God's Work, Our Hands



1 God's work, our hands: work - ing to - geth - er,
2 God's work, our feet: trav - 'ling to - geth - er,
3 God's work, our voice: sing - ing to - geth - er,
4 God is at work in and a - round us:



build - ing a fu - ture, re - pair - ing the world,
fol - low - ing Je - sus to plac - es un - known,
prais - ing, pro - claim - ing to all who will hear,
seed - lings are sprout - ing and bread's on the rise!



rais - ing up homes, plant - ing new gar - dens,
walk - ing as friends, march - ing for free - dom,
pray - ing for peace, shout - ing for jus - tice,
Washed and set free, hum - bled and hon - ored,



feed - ing the hun - gry and shelt - 'ring the cold.
run - ning the race with God's fu - ture the goal.
claim - ing God's love for the lost and the least.
gift - ed by grace, we re - spond in God's love.



Bless, God, our hands as we work in your name,
Bless, God, our feet as we fol - low your way,
Bless, God, our voice as we speak in your name,
Bless, God, our lives as we an - swer your call,



shar - ing the good news of your Gos - pel.

Text: Wayne L. Wold

Music: EARTH AND ALL STARS, David N. Johnson

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Prayers of the Church

P: Drawn together in the compassion of God, we pray for the church, the world, and all those in need.

A brief silence.

P: Hoyl God, you welcome us when we are weak in faith. Uphold your church throughout the world; make it a place of welcome. Strengthen faith through online Bible studies and Sunday schools, confirmation classes and youth ministries. Nurture new ministries of education and growth, especially as we continue to worship apart. Lord, in your mercy,

G: **hear our prayer.**

P: The heights of the heavens show us the vastness of your steadfast love. Have compassion on your creation. Where human selfishness has brought ruin and destruction, we look to you to heal, renew, and redeem your world. Lord, in your mercy,

G: **hear our prayer.**

P: Make your ways known to the nations. Speak kindness to our bitter grudges. Settle our hearts when we want to settle accounts with violence. Bless our leaders with patience and wisdom. Lord, in your mercy,

G: **hear our prayer.**

P: Bring healing and justice wherever harm is dealt. Provide vindication for all who are oppressed. Free victims of human trafficking and forced labor; deliver all who are bound by debt. Feed all who are hungry, and guard refugees fleeing famine, poverty, and war. Lord, in your mercy,

G: **hear our prayer.**

P: Teach us to forgive. Remind us that you do not always accuse us. Give us pause when we are tempted to pass judgment and argue unnecessarily. Make this congregation a community of mercy for one another and for all our neighbors. Lord, in your mercy,

G: **hear our prayer.**

P: For who or what else do the people of God pray?

A silence is given so that your prayers may be offered.

P: Lord, in your mercy,

G: **hear our prayer.**

P: Whether we live or whether we die, we are yours. We thank you for those who have showed us faithfulness. Lord, in your mercy,

G: **hear our prayer.**

P: All these things and whatever else you see that we need, we entrust to your mercy; through Christ our Lord.

G: **Amen.**

Lord's Prayer

P: Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray.

G: **Our Father in heaven,**

hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come, your will be done,

on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial

and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours,

now and forever.

Amen.

Announcements

P: We thank you for joining us for this service. If you would like to hear other services or access the newest edition of *the Quill*, our newsletter, we invite you to go to our website at queenannelutheran.org.

P: Receive now the blessing:

Benediction

A: Let us bless the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

P: Almighty God, the Father, † the Son, and the Holy Spirit, bless and preserve you.

G: Amen.

Dismissal

P: Go in peace. Serve the Lord.

G: Thanks be to God.

Postlude

Finale Jubilante
Healey Willan

About Today's Music

Today we celebrate “God’s Work. Our Hands.” We sing the eponymous hymn for this annual event, joining our voices with those who gathered for a recorded chapel service held at the ELCA Churchwide Office. The organ prelude and postlude by prolific Anglo-Canadian composer Healey Willan sound a trumpet call of joyful optimism – enabled by God’s love for us in Christ Jesus, even in uncertain times we rejoice in our baptismal calling to share the Gospel and to serve others.