

Today we celebrate and give thanks for the women of the Lutheran Women's Missionary League. [If you are a member of the LWML would you please stand up? Thank you.]

These women [that just stood up] follow in the footsteps of four very special women: Mary, the mother of James and Salome; Joanna, Mary Magdalene and Salome, the mother of James and John. These four women were with Jesus as they stood at the foot of the cross. They kept the Virgin Mary, the mother of our Lord company. After everyone else abandoned Jesus, they would stay with Jesus and hear the last seven words that He spoke from the cross. These four women stood fast; they wanted to make sure that Jesus was not alone as He endured the sins of the world on the cross. They knew their standing at the foot of the cross might not amount to much, but they did what they could, they gave their widow's mite of faithfulness and loyalty. Surrounded by hatred, these women showed love.

When everyone else doubted and thought that it was all over, that all hope was lost, Mary, Joanna, Mary Magdalene, and Salome got up before sunrise, Easter Sunday morning, to complete Jesus' burial which they had begun on Good Friday. As they approached the tomb they were astonished to find Jesus' grave open, the stone had been rolled away. Fearing the worst, these women gathered their courage and respectfully, slowly, tentatively, entered Jesus' grave. The women saw a young man sitting on the right side of the tomb. He was dressed in a white robe and they were afraid. The man said to them, "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified, He has risen. Christ has risen!" Jesus then appeared to the women and entrusted them with a mission: tell the disciples that Christ is risen. That truth, that promise, meant that the women and all those who believe and are baptized would be living with Jesus, in righteousness and purity forever; both in love of neighbor here on earth and at the right hand of God the Father in heaven. Those who saw the resurrected Jesus almost 2,000 years ago and those who today, still hold fast and confess the truth that Jesus suffered, died, rose from the dead, ascended into heaven, and promises to come again, live forever with Jesus. As the theme for the LWML says: Being With Jesus – Living On The Edge.

Today, almost 2,000 years later, the mission that Jesus gave to those four women is the mission of the LWML, their message is your message; it is also the message of the Holy Christian Church on earth. Jesus lives and that means we live with Him. The ladies of the Lutheran Women's Missionary League and all those who are kept in the one true faith live on the edge. Think about it, we live in a land where the U.S. Supreme Court begins every session with an invocation, "God save the United States and this honorable court!" But that same court who prays God's blessing upon their work, refuses to allow athletic teams to bow their head in prayer before or after a game. We live in an age where living with Jesus means you live on the edge.

We live in a time when the President of the United States can ask God's blessing when He is installed and after terrorists bring down the World Trade Center, Congress can stand on the Capital steps and sing "God Bless America"; but a valedictorian cannot speak about Jesus in her life nor can a graduating class have a prayer during their commencement ceremonies. We live in an age where living with Jesus means you live on the edge.

Saying the name "Jesus" as in "Jesus is the Savior" is too controversial, but we can go to the movies and hear His name taken in vain. Talk to your brothers and sisters in Christ around the world, who every Sunday go to church in fear of terrorist attacks. They never miss, even though many die, becoming martyrs for the faith. We live in an age where living with Jesus means you live on the edge.

Talk to any student at a state run institution; ask them what will happen if they profess their faith in Christ. Look at the media. Every pastor or priest who is portrayed in a movie or on

television is shown as a prude or a pervert; and Christian parents are portrayed as dense and intolerant, unloving and ignorant. The evening news constantly parades people's scandals before us, making sure to point out that it was a Christian.

Unnoticed and unshared are the multitudes of faithful servants of the Word who have dedicated their lives to a proper preaching of the Gospel. Unrecognized and uncelebrated are the millions of Christians who are good neighbors, good citizens, good parents, and good witnesses of Jesus Christ, who fear, love and trust in God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit above all things. Unnoticed are those who repent of their sins, turn away from that which causes them to sin and trusts in the forgiveness of those sins. We live in an age where living with Jesus means you live on the edge.

This nave is filled with people who live with Jesus on the edge. You have met Jesus in the waters of Baptism, He has made you His brothers and sisters, fellow heirs of heaven. Jesus has talked with you through His Holy Word read from that lectern and preached at this pulpit and in Bible study. He has had a conversation with you in prayer and in the liturgy. Jesus has forgiven you and saved you; He has comforted you in life's tragedies and given you a sure certain knowledge of forgiveness, eternal life and salvation in heaven. You are with Jesus now and always. You are strangers in a strange land. You are living on the edge.

You know that when unbelief has done its work in the hearts of humankind, when the world has tried to shove Jesus back into His grave, when the devil has tried to dethrone Jesus from His seat in heaven, when sin has slammed shut the door of salvation; the doubt and the despair and the pain and the suffering and the tears remains and all the world can offer to take Jesus' place is more darkness and more despair and a future filled with the fear of an open grave.

You who live in the Lord, through the waters of Holy Baptism and the forgiveness of sins; you who are with Jesus, in the eating and drinking of Jesus' body and blood in His Supper; you do today and always live on the edge. By your being here today, you are taking a stand against sin, death and the power of the devil; you are living in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. What you have received from the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, His grace, mercy and peace is what the world needs. The living Lord has comforted you as you endured sickness and pain and suffering, and as you stood at the grave of a departed loved one. Your hope is in the promise of heaven that is yet to come; the crown of life, the robe of righteousness, the mansions prepared for you before the foundation of the world.

By your witness to Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, by being here in the presence of God today, giving Him alone all thanks, praise, service and obedience, and by the way you live your daily lives in humble love and compassion toward your neighbor; you are saying to the corrupt and dying world, "Your way creates families which are filled with bitterness and strife, children who want and are never satisfied, teens who feel neglected and ignored, and women who find no man to honor, serve and obey." You are saying to the devil, "Your way does nothing to stop the tide of disobedience which fills prisons to overflowing. Your way brings down one elected official and business man after another." You are making the right witness, that the way of Christ is repentance and forgiveness and truth and beauty and holiness and compassion. The way of Christ is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. That is the mission of the Lutheran Women's Missionary League, of this congregation and all those who believe and are baptized. Ours is the way of Jesus Christ. In His Holy Name. Amen.