

April 19, 2015
"State of the Church Address"



I thought it appropriate to give a "State of the Church Address," since Lent is over and Easter is underway. So, I want to talk a little about the church universal and a little more about *Tree of Life*. Universally, the church is alive and well, but it is also being watched very closely by the world, proponents and enemies alike. Because of that, incidents such as that which occurred in Balch Springs, where a pastor was arrested in connection with the death of a 2-year old, cause the church to be scrutinized, analyzed and criticized more than ever. For better or worse, we are being watched as church-people to see how we react to the actions of the church at large, but believe it or not this gives us more opportunities to faithfully witness about Jesus Christ, our risen Lord.

This has been, is and will be the state of the whole church on earth until Christ returns. We will be scrutinized for every decision we make. We will be accused and persecuted for everything that goes wrong within the walls of a church regardless of our relationship to the various people and places where things go wrong. This is our lot. But as I said, this gives us the opportunity to be faithful witnesses to our Lord and Savior.

That brings me to our current state here at *Tree of Life*. First off, let me just say that it has been such a privilege to get to know you all and

serve you as your pastor so far in my ministry here, and for the most part everything is going pretty well.

I say it that way, because there are always things that can be improved, not because I think that something is going or has the potential to go terribly wrong. In fact from what I can tell, we are a healthy congregation with a lot of wonderful ministries and ministry opportunities on the horizon. And though my transition into the call you extended to me as your pastor has been smooth, it has not been without minor hiccups and mistakes. For those shortfalls, I am sorry and apologize wholeheartedly. But, even in the face of those mistakes and their frustrations, I believe we are doing some good work in God's Kingdom, and I am working to smooth out any wrinkles that I have mistakenly caused.

To illustrate my point that things are going well, here is a look at some of the things that go on at *Tree*: We have a thriving group in "Young at Heart," that is always busy coming up with new ideas and projects. We had a very successful Easter Celebration for over 30 children of the community with an egg hunt and other activities. There is a super group of quilters that produced right around 60 quilts to be given to those in need. Our Fall Festival was, as always, very successful, as was our VBS. We even have a great "Lutheranism 101" class that meets regularly and rambunctiously and a rowdy Thursday Morning Bible Study that has a fabulous

fire for learning God's word. Not to mention that we support Toler, White Rock, Good Samaritan and Firehouse 5 just up the road. Our attendance seems to be going up (we are even planning on a 'New Members' Sunday for May 3), and our youth is composed of very active, driven and blessedly ornery young men and women. Our *Tree* is thriving, because of the Word of God and His Holy Spirit among us. As a wise and experienced pastor once told me, the church has no needs. *Tree of Life* has all that is needful. We have Christ as our Lord and Life. This is the most wonderful news that we could ever receive. This is the most blessed state in which we could ever be.

I have even more good news though! Just because we have no needs, that doesn't mean we can't grow. There is plenty of room for *Tree* to spread out its roots and stretch out its branches. We have plenty of fruit that is just waiting to be shared with the watching world. And so, here is a brief peek of my vision for the future of *Tree*. I would like to have several "Passing the Plate with Pastor" get-togethers, where y'all can get to know me and my family all the better. There are a couple midweek classes that I would like to do after Lutheranism 101 has come to a conclusion. In August, I would like to have a "Super Servant Sunday" where we get out and about in the community with several servant activities and get going great guns on some things here at the church. And, there is going to be a lot of brainstorming on things that we can do in the

areas of outreach and stewardship. In short, this is an exciting time for *Tree of Life* and us, the various leaves of that *Tree*.

As always, thank you for all of your service to Christ and his Kingdom here on earth, and thank you for your support for me and my family. If you have any questions, suggestions, ideas or a desire to get plugged in somewhere specific in our church, please let me or an elder know. Now may the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the Father who raised Jesus from the grave, Jesus the Christ who overcame sin and death and the Holy Ghost who is our seal of salvation, our giver of faith and the one who enlightens us to the truth of salvation in Christ bless and preserve you by His gift of grace. Amen.

Pastor Carl J. H.

