

# *Rejoicing in the Great Things the Lord has Done*

“The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy” (Psalm 126:3)

## **Opening of the Academic Year and Installation of Brian Friedrich as President**

**Engagement.** That’s the word to summarize what I’ll be saying this evening. Engagement. I thank you for the honor of speaking at this opening service. Greetings from Concordia Seminary! At Concordia Seminary we still do things the old way, our classes begin after Labor Day. I’m itching to get into the classroom and I’m sure you feel the same way. Thank you for the fine ministerial students you have sent and will continue to send. This is true not only of pre-ministerial students but, I’m sure, of all who go out from Concordia to be servant leaders in their chosen vocations. For that the church thanks you, the faculty, the staff, the donors and supports of Concordia, and yes, also you who are administrators. Congratulations to you, Mr. President, upon your election to stand in the train of the servant leaders who have served Concordia so very well in the past. I have one special memory of your family, President Friedrich. Your father picked me up at the Fargo airport and drove me to Jamestown. During that drive, he turned to me and said, “In Jamestown we have the biggest bull in the world.” Huh? I didn’t know what to say. Well, he explained that Jamestown has the world’s biggest man-made, concrete bull. President Friedrich, with your abilities, your excellent faculty and staff, and with God’s blessings, people won’t say that when they drive to Seward!

In 1884 Woodrow Wilson, then 28 years old, wrote Ellen Axson, the woman who would become his wife: “I am afraid of being a mere student. I want to be part of the nature around me, not an outside observer of it.... You’ll never find in a cloister a fulcrum for any lever which can budge the world.” Wilson was not opposed to academia. From 1902 until 1910 he was president of Princeton University. What Wilson feared was an academia that was not **engaged...there’s the word...engaged with the world.** Wilson, you know, was engaged. He served as governor of New Jersey from 1910 until 1912 and as President of the United States from 1912 until 1920. “You’ll never find in a cloister a fulcrum for any lever which can budge the world.”

It’s a big world out there. I was in Leipzig, Germany two weeks ago. I went to an internet café to check my e-mail...to a guy who remembers when our family got its first TV in the 1950’s this internet thing is amazing!... I went to an internet cafe and got an e-mail from a friend in Washington D.C. However, he wasn’t in D.C. He was in Honolulu. “I’m in Honolulu. Wow!” “Well, I’m in Germany, double wow!” Like it or not, we’re engaged with this world. The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod is not a little German enclave. Pentecost 2000 has shown that. And Concordia is not a little college in the middle of Nebraska. Concordia is a university and **your engagement is with the whole world.**

**That’s the way God has His people deployed, in worldwide engagements.** My friend in Honolulu who lives in D.C., who works for a California congressman, who e-mailed me in Germany? Good, go to church every Sunday Lutheran. It’s often not obvious to us but God has His people deployed to engage the world. **That was true when Psalm 126 was written.** It was written after some Jews returned to Jerusalem from the Babylonian captivity. Remember, in 586 B.C. Jerusalem was destroyed and the Jews were deported to Babylon, in what is now Iraq. In 539 Cyrus freed the Jews and some of them returned home. *When the Lord brought back the captives to Zion, we were like men who dreamed. Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy. The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy.*

That it was the Lord who had brought them home from Babylonia was not obvious. The media would have described it as an important geopolitical event, but nothing more. But the Jews, who had once been a ragtag bunch of slaves and who had been turned into the people of God by the exodus and the desert wanderings... **these Jews saw with the eyes of faith that their exile and return was God's engagement with the world.**

We have been constituted as the people of God by our baptism into the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Like the Jews of the psalm, we are wending our way home from exile to *an inheritance that is incorrupt, undefiled, and that fades not away, reserved in heaven for you who are kept by faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice* (1 Peter 1:4-6). As you and I are journeying toward our heavenly home, we have our various vocations. **Through our training and deployment in the tasks of daily life, God is engaging the world today just as much as He did back in Bible times.** I like to make this point to my students every quarter. I'll ask them, "Has God fulfilled all of the promises that He has for your life?" The students piously nod yes. They're practicing that pious nod that pastors have. Pastoral puppies they are. Then I say, "No, I don't think God has" and they twist their pastoral puppy heads trying to understand. "Listen, guys, God has promised to be with you always (Matthew 28:20). I assume He's kept that promise to date but He still has a lot of promise keeping to do. Or how about this one? *He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of our Lord Jesus Christ*" (Philippians 1:6). Has God fully kept that?" Now they've got it; they shake their heads "no." God has kept that promise so far but needs to keep it all the way until we reach our heavenly inheritance. Then I drive home my point: "You are not preparing to be archaeologists of ancient religious sites or curators of an old religious museum. You are going out to engage the world as it is today for God. God is as alive and active today as He was in Bible times!" **That engagement happens through the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ who lives in us.** That's the key to God's engagement with the world through His people today, that you are engaged personally with the Lord Jesus Christ. *For God, who said, "let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ* (2 Corinthians 4:6).

**It's a big world and this university will not be doing its job if it does not live and breathe the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ engaged with the world.** The president, the administration, the faculty, the staff, students preparing for church work, students preparing for careers in business, in law, in social service, in communications, in what have you, God is deploying you now and God will deploy you in the future so that the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ might engage the world. Let me demonstrate that this is nothing new; it's the tradition of Concordia. Years ago I was introduced to an African woman, Doreen Moyo. She told me that back home in Zimbabwe she listened to me on The Lutheran Hour every Sunday evening with a group of friends. After the broadcast was over, they would discuss what they had heard. What was Doreen doing in the United States? She was on her way to Concordia in Seward to further her education. So I'm not really saying anything new to you. It's a big world and Concordia's tradition is to be engaged with the world. The psalmist said, ***The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy.*** Let's rejoice at the opportunity to breathe deeper of the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ and engage the world through our various deployments as we've never engaged it before. What was it that Woodrow Wilson said? What was it? "You'll never find in a cloister a fulcrum for any lever which can budge the world." At Concordia University I think you will.

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