

Dear Friends in Christ,

Can anything good come out of Nazareth? (Jn 1:46) Hometowns always stink, it seems. I've lived in St. Cloud for 3 years now, and I gotta tell you, a lot of people who live here hate the place. But that's not unusual. A lot of people dislike where they live. It's fun to be cynical and pessimistic. It gives us the moral high ground. This town stinks, but I'm alright!

GK Chesterton wrote in his book *Orthodoxy* (if you're looking for a great read or to get into Chesterton, I'd start with this book) that a dump neighborhood in London would be as great as Paris if her residents loved her enough. People don't love cities because they're great; cities are great because people love them.

If you live in St. Cloud, love it. If you live in Clear Lake, love it. Are there things we'd like to change? Absolutely. We have to love a place enough that we want to change it. That's the only way.

It's the same thing with congregations. I happen to like both of my congregations. If I didn't like you, I don't know if I'd tell you. But I suppose it doesn't matter if I like you. It does matter though that I love you. It matters that you love your congregation. People don't love congregations because they're great; congregations are great because people love them. God doesn't love us because we're great; we're great because God loves us and sent His Son to die for us.

To that end, we're starting a circuit newsletter, edited by yours truly. If you like the title (*The Cloud*), great. I came up with it. Our congregations are in the St. *Cloud* Circuit of the Minnesota North District of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod (how's that for an organization flowchart?). Clouds have Biblical significance. God appears in a glory cloud. He was with His people in a cloud by day and fire by night. A cloud appears at Jesus' transfiguration. Jesus ascends into heaven on a cloud. If you don't like the title, well go read some other circuit newsletter (if you can find one!!!).

You should know that our circuit is extremely blessed. We have great participation by our pastors. Most show up to our monthly meetings (called Winkels). We actually talk about substantive things. I hear from most of my classmates that their Winkels are boring and nobody participates. You can call the St. Cloud Winkel many things, but don't you dare call it boring.

If we want to actually make a difference, we have to focus on things we can actually do. We despair at the state of our nation, and so we don't do anything in our families or town. Want to change the world? Start by having family dinners. We despair at the state of the church, and so

we don't do anything in our congregations or circuits. Want to change the Synod? Make our congregations and circuit the best. You change the world by showing up to church on Sunday.

See you soon,

Pastor