

Dear members and friends of St. John,

Living in the Information Age is interesting. We have fingertip access to more information than any other time in history. But what does all this information do for us? People normally think of information as good – information equals power. And power equals wealth. But the question that needs to be asked is this: How has the Information Age affected the spiritual lives of people?

I think **one of the effects on the church**, and therefore the spiritual life of people, is the **growing independence that people sense they have** to chart their own course through life. Research has shown that people spend less time inviting friends and family over for parties and dinners. People are much less concerned with 'membership' in organizations, and more interested in freedom from commitment. In short, people isolate themselves from the world in ways that our grandparents would never have dreamed of. To "belong to something bigger than yourself" was understood by our ancestors as part and parcel of being an American. And church and family were the central institutions that they turned to as places of refuge in times of political or economic uncertainty. Church was life. Family was life. They were 'institutions' that you could depend on in times of prosperity and disillusionment. Even if your relatives died or moved away, your church family was always there – always ready to help. Church was the rock that couldn't be moved by men or nature. Do we still see the church in this light today?

Adding to this 'independent thinking' that we see in the 21st century is **a world that places 'organization' in a bad light.** The recent melt down of Wall Street only adds to people's suspicions about government and corporations – and church denominations like the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod get dragged into the fray. How can you trust the Church, people will, say when it's run by sinful people that don't always have your best interests in mind?

Well first, God has created His Church and all governments on the face of the earth. In doing so, He rules them separately. **The world, including government and business, is run by His control over vocation.** God raises up people, with specific talents, to work in business and government. He opens doors, closes others, and moves people through society in ways that we can't see. We attribute much to good or bad luck, but the providence of God is the real force behind all that is good in the world. Yes, evil penetrates where good was intended, but God allows the bad for our good. He uses the 'down times' and even personal economic loss to turn us back to the only solid ground we can find: His Church on earth.

Now, the way that God controls Church is completely different. **God controls His church by love.** His Church was formed by the Gospel, the knowledge that God himself had to take on the sins of the whole world, and die, so that we could be reconciled to Him. There has never been a greater display of love than what our Lord did for us on the cross. He rose after being in the grave three days, so that we could overcome death, as well. He has brought us into His family, so that we can look forward to the day when the whole family of God will live together in complete peace, joy, and love. That's the Easter message. One of love, and hope – a hope that won't disappoint.

So to answer the skeptics that question why you cling to a church that is full of sinners, I offer you the following: **God's Church is a place that no government, no amount of economic upheaval, no amount of evil, can overturn.** Jesus, pointing to Peter's confession of faith, says in Matthew 16: *"And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."* Peter's faith in Christ would not disappoint. That same faith that Peter confessed, is the faith that brings you to church on Saturday evenings or Sunday mornings. It's a faith that no economic downturn, no evil force, no loss whatsoever can destroy.

Are you part of "something greater than yourself"? Yes, you are a child of God. You are part of your church, St. John Lutheran Church, to be exact. You belong to God and He sees that you are nourished and fed by His Word and Sacrament. You are the best thing that God has created, and He will protect you and sustain you in this life. May God give you a clear and certain knowledge of the love that He has for you this Easter season, a love that will never disappoint.

Pastor Travis