The Installation of Beth Warpmaker
Kinsmen Lutheran Church
September 21, 2014
Bishop Mike Rinehart

Isaiah 43:10-13, 16-20
Acts 16:6-15
Matthew 28:16-20

Welcome Beth Warpmaker. Welcome back to the Synod. We missed you in your 11-year sojourn. We need you. We're glad you're here. Welcome also to your husband and family. Mark, we're glad you're here too. I've been trying to decide, since you're going to stay the director of Lutheran Partners in Global Mission, does that now mean that Houston is the headquarters for LPGM? I like it. You and LPGM have been leaders in the collaborative work that is being done in our companion synod, the Central African republic and other places. Welcome back to the heat and humidity of Houston, and congratulations: no more shoveling.

Congratulations Kinsmen on an excellent pastor. Clearly the process worked for you. Kinsmen has a history of being a leading congregation in stewardship, and leadership and discipleship. You have challenged other congregations to adaptive change, and to new ways of doing things.

But yesterday's innovations will not sustain us today. The world is still changing at a dizzying rate, and the pace of that change is increasing at dizzying speeds.

When I started as Bishop there was no such thing as an iPhone. The largest of the new iPhones that were released on Friday now costs $900 retail, twice as much as a Desktop computer. But it can do more. And it has more computing power than was available to the intelligence community during the Reagan administration. In just a matter of years the newspaper industry has been decimated. Print media is on the rocks. Last year electronic books outsold printed books in the United States. Video shops and CD shops of gone out of business because everybody buys music and videos online.

Facebook and Twitter had just come on the market. Twitter fueled the Arab Spring. The Internet has allowed people to see how the rest of the world lives. Terrorists now put beheadings on YouTube. Good things have changed as well. There are less people starving to death then there were 10 years ago, both by percentage of the global population and also by the raw numbers. Malaria deaths have plummeted. Epidemics like the Ebola outbreak still pop up, but are now met with a united global effort. Wells are being dug all over the world, by people of faith in people of compassion, providing clean water to villages that have never had it, meaning longer lives and healthier children.

In the midst of all this change, what is God doing in the world? What is God up to? And how is God calling us to be the hands and feet of Jesus in the 21st century?

We simply can not expend our energy trying to recreate yesterday's church structures. They were built for a bygone era. Even today's church structures were built for a context that no longer exists. We must stop bemoaning the loss of the ice cream social... There aren't as many ice cream socials as there used to be, but guess what... More people are eating ice cream than

ever. There aren't as many bowling leagues as there used to be, but there are more people bowling than ever.

Stop bemoaning the demise of Sunday school, which was invented in 19th century England to get kids off the street. The church survived for 1800 years without Sunday school. There must be many ways of doing Christian formation. I'm not saying abandon Sunday school. I'm saying God may be doing a new thing.

"Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old," Isaiah says.
"I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?
I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert."

I'm watching with interest what Pastor Mark England is doing with discipleship groups. I'm so intrigued I did a podcast interview with him that will go up this week. He trying to make disciples who make disciples who make disciples. Start a chain reaction of discipleship that is out of control. It doesn't have to be managed top-down by a discipleship committee. It is Spirit-driven.

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"I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?
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What new thing is God doing? Well, As I look around I see the implosion of denominations. As a bishop I say, so what? For the last 500 years Christianity has been organized by denominations. It worked okay. Imperfectly. But really, how much sense does it make today to organize churches around Late Medieval Reformation polarities? I'm not saying abandon denominations. They have had tremendous capacity and global reach, but God may be doing a new thing.

Phyllis Tickle says every 500 years the church has a huge rummage sale. In 500 the church reorganized with the collapse of the Roman Empire. In 1,000 was the Great Schism of the Eastern and Western Churches. In 1500 came the Reformation. And now?

The good news is each time the church has thrived in times of change. The church reorganized and retooled for a new era of ministry. What is God doing? We don't know. We may not see the final product in our lifetime. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of God lasts forever.

We believe that Jesus the crucified Jew was and is that word of God in the flesh. We believe the church is called in every age to walk in his footsteps. To heal the sick, preach the word and raise the dead.

When I asked Pastor Beth Warpmaker about her vision, she spoke of the Church as blessing. We are blessed to be a blessing. "We, the church, are to be the (however imperfect) embodiment of God's incarnational love for the community and the world. She believes the church has both a local mission and a global mission. She believes that we are in the midst of a changing world and the changing church. The church needs to be more nimble and adaptive in order to be responsive to what the Spirit is doing.

Every time I say have said "Beth Warpmaker" into my phone over this last month, dictation has rendered it Beth "work–maker." Perhaps that's not so far from the truth. If the role of the pastor

is as Paul says, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, then her role is to equip all of you, or as we say down here all y'all, to be a blessing to the world.

Jesus did not say, "when I was hungry you hired a pastor to give me something to eat. When I was thirsty, you hired a pastor to give me something to drink. When I was a stranger, you hired a pastor to walk of me. When I was sick and in prison, you hired a pastor come and visit." Together we are the body of Christ. Pastor Beth Warpmaker and Pastor Mark England's role is to preach the word and administer the sacraments that feed and strengthen the whole body of Christ for ministry in the world. Pastor Beth has the same function as Sean Payton: To equip the saints for the work of ministry.

What is God doing? I believe God is blocking some roads and inviting us to dream new dreams. God is calling us to Macedonia. God is calling us to make disciples in a new world.

What is God doing? I believe God is calling us to be a network of grace-filled, Christ-centered, outwardly-focused congregations passing the faith to the next generation.

What is God doing? I believe God is calling us To move beyond institutional survival, to follow Jesus into the world. I believe God is calling us to the way of the cross: to seek out the lonely, the lost, the hurting, the forgotten, bringing a word of hope and compassion. If you want to see the face of God, look at the stranger. That's something anyone can do in any generation, in times of change and in times of stability. And we can do it in fresh, new, creative ways.

Pastor Beth, Pastor Mark, Sara, brothers and sisters in Christ in this place:

Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old.
Behold, I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?
I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.

Go, make disciples, for lo I am with you always, even to the end of time.