

The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus is the largest member of the Lutheran World Federation with over 10.4 million members. Not only does Ethiopia have more Lutherans than the U.S., it has 5 times as many Lutherans per capita.

The Ethiopian Lutheran Church is not in fellowship with the LCMS, but talks have been underway as they work through conversations with the LCMS on important topics such as women's ordination and the role of the Lutheran Confessions in defining the theology and practice of the Lutheran Church in Ethiopia.

But this church body reflects the changing face of the Christian Church. Christianity has blossomed in the Global South. One statistic estimated 80% of Christians in Europe and North America in 1910, but only 38% of Christians being in Europe and North America by 2010.

Not only can we thank the work of international missionaries who spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ to far flung places, but we can be thankful for local Christians such as Gudina Tumsa for taking that message, and sharing it with his own people.

Gudina Tumsa was raised in a family of Ethiopian Orthodox Christians, but the mixture of Christianity with tribal religion proved to be a stumbling block to him when European Lutheran missionaries taught him the Gospel. Like Gideon who destroyed his father's altar to Baal, or Saint Boniface chopping down Thor's Oak, Gudina chopped down his village's spirit tree which was devoted to worship of what in fact were demons. He was exiled from his family at age ten and lived with missionaries.

At first trained as a surgeon's assistant, he later felt the call of the ministry. After serving as an evangelist in various places in Ethiopia, he received a scholarship to study in St. Paul, Minnesota to get a bachelor's degree in divinity. He returned to Ethiopia and later became the General Secretary of the Ethiopian Lutheran Church Mekane Yesus.

Africa is not known for political stability, and Ethiopia is no exception. From Italian occupation in World War II, to feudal rulership under an Emperor, things went from bad to worse as the communist regime called the Derg took power in 1974. This atheistic regime persecuted the Church, and after a series of arrests, finally they kidnapped and killed Gudina Tumsa in 1979. Sadly, it was only thirteen years after his death that his family and friends at church found his body, and confirmed that he was indeed killed instead of merely abducted.

As we continue our sermon series fighting for, we see that Gudina Tumsa fought for the Church of all tribes. He worked tirelessly to bring to maturity a church that was birthed from the valiant efforts of foreign missionaries. He worked to bring the Mekane Yesus church beyond its tribalism to be united into something

more. GUDINA TUMSA TEACHES US THE CHURCH CONSISTS OF ALL TRIBES.

What does it mean that the Church is the Church of all tribes? First, I. The Church of All Tribes means more than just us. The Mekane Yesus Church is an amalgamation of the missionary efforts of various European missionaries including those from Germany, Norway, and Switzerland. In one of his essays, Tumsa remarked that there were four districts within this church body each with its unique practices and emphases. He called to have them consider a unified church rite for the sake of consistency.

Likewise, Tumsa worked to build bridges between the Mekane Yesus Church and other church bodies. This practice of finding common ground with other churches is called ecumenism. This, like many other things, can be taken too far when we agree that there is common ground when there is in fact no common ground, but seeking unity is what Christ prayed for in the upper room when he called for the unity of His disciples.

Many people think that it was this striving toward unity, along with refusing to be a fundraising puppet for the communist regime, that got Tumsa killed. A totalitarian regime's biggest threat is any organization that gives people purpose and meaning outside of the government.

In Revelation 13, we see a beast rise out of the sea which represents ungodly governments. The devil gives power to this beast, and John the Evangelist tells us that many worshipped the beast. Idolatrous government wants it to be all in all, and dictators want to be worshipped, and won't allow the Church to stand for that reason. Thus, it was critical that Tumsa and other Ethiopian Christians worked to confess their faith even in the face of opposition.

The Church of all Tribes means more than just us. Although we strive to teach the Bible in its fullest purity, at the same time, we admit that in spite of false teachings, Christians of other denominations are also going to heaven. It is good for us to have friends in other Christian denominations, and to better understand them. It is more important now than ever to find common ground with other Christians on issues we can agree with such as marriage and sexuality as well as the sanctity of life, as enemies outside the Church sharpen their knives against us.

Likewise, Gudina Tumsa can encourage us to avoid tribalism within our own denomination. It can be a struggle that you may not know what exactly to expect if you go to an LCMS church in another town. You may have to do your homework before you go, so to speak. Nonetheless, Christ is calling us to love other LCMS Lutherans who may disagree on various topics of a secondary nature.

Second, II. The Church of all tribes reaches to all people. The wife of Gudina Tumsa recalls their mission work to the Kambata people in Southern Ethiopia. It was a difficult season as they couldn't speak the language and the food

there was poor in nutrients. Nonetheless, Gudina and his wife rejoiced as people heard the Gospel and came to faith. By reaching out to this group of people, the Church was able to break a barrier and impact an entire region of Ethiopia.

We recall the joy from the Ethiopian Eunuch hearing the Gospel from Philip. As we fight for the Church of all tribes, we see that there are people groups that are also unreached. For us, it may not be a tribe in the Amazon, but it could be your bridge club, the cliques in your workplace, or even a household in your family.

In 2016, the General Secretary of the Mekane Yesus Church spoke at the Synod convention. He rejoiced that the Church in Ethiopia was growing by leaps and bounds: between 3% and 8% per year. He attributed it to lay evangelism. It wasn't because of how nice their church buildings were or how many church programs they had. He said it was because of individual Christians each reaching to their "tribes" that they were able to succeed.

We can't just plop a Bible on someone's desk and expect them to read it and understand it. The Ethiopian Eunuch didn't understand Isaiah. God is calling us to sit in people's chariots and explain the Gospel message to them contained in these wonderful pages of the Bible.

Finally, III. The Church of all tribes cannot be destroyed. Jesus gives this wonderful promise: "**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.**" Under the Derg persecution in the 70s and 80s, the Mekane Yesus church underwent many trials. Many Christians were imprisoned, tortured, and killed, including Gudina Tumsa. His wife was imprisoned and it was a miracle that she lived to tell the tale.

Despite the rage of the atheistic government, Christ was able to grow that Church both numerically as well as grow them in faithfulness. When the government shut down worship services, the Church split into thousands of splinter small groups which were more local and personal than any one centralized congregation. Tumsa wrote, "We as Christians cannot simply tolerate a bad situation and keep quiet. It is our duty to act, to speak and even risk our life. The power of the resurrection is experienced only through death."

The Lord worked miracles in the Ethiopian Church at that time. Some cadres of spies sent to inform the government of the actions of the Church ended up becoming Christians. Prison guards came to faith from the witness of prisoners, and Jesus was able to sustain some prisoners beyond what many medical experts would have thought possible.

As we go out these doors tonight, we can be encouraged by the witness of Gudina Tumsa, known by many as the Ethiopian Bonhoeffer, as well as the boldness of the Mekane Yesus Church, and know that because Christ has died and rose again, we are strengthened to endure all persecution, and that no matter what the devil may throw at us, the Lord has a plan for our lives.