



104th Michigan District Convention 2025

Opening Service Message – Rev. Dr. Matthew Harrison

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. I usually am not too nervous about preaching, but I am nervous tonight. In fact, I'm on the verge of distraught as all of us are in different places in our understanding of what's happening or not happening with this place. And we have uncertainty on top of us, especially as we sit in this glorious chapel, which has been the place of so many wonderful things that have happened to us and our families and our hopes and dreams and our district, Michigan District, over so many years.

So the theme of your journey convention is remember, renew, and return to the Lord. Return to the word of the Lord. And all I can preach for, remember, renew and return to the word is Jesus. Jesus' Hebrew name is Yeshua. Yah saves. Yahweh saves. Joshua, Jesus saves.

This Old Testament section, 1 Kings, about Ezekiel and all those wonderful stories about him troubling the prophets of Baal. Jezebel lived in this time. She's writing the story there. She's the daughter of a pagan king from Tiro and Sidon. [She] marries Ahaz; he goes really bad, sets up pagan worship all over the place, the Baals, he's worshipping the pagan god, setting up Asherah poles, and Ezekiel is there speaking against it. Well, you know as well as I do. Most people today you talk to think the Bible is a bunch of myths. They think it's a bunch of inconceivable stories that have just made up out of whole cloth. Well, that's not the case. There's been found a little seal with Elijah's name on it, right at the right spot in the region of Israel where he prophesied. One after another, discoveries are made, we found many others. Jezebel, likewise, a little bulla for her existence with her name on it, right from the right time. Nabal's vineyard, archeologists have found, which is the appropriate place in Samaria. In fact, there are in 1 Kings alone a number of names that are testified to by history, by inscriptions, by histories of kings, et cetera. So all of these are verified outside the Bible: Omri and Ahab and Jehoram and Jehu and Jehoahaz and Menahem and Pekah and Hoshea, all kings of Israel. Then kings of Judah, David Jehoram, Ahaz, Hezekiah, Manasseh, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, Zedekiah, and then of course pagan King Nebuchadnezzar II.

But there's something much more important than those facts. The Bible is true, but what's more important is, it is the powerful, active Word of God. It is absolutely true, and more than that, is the effective Word of God. It is a living and mighty and active, sharper than any two-edged sword piercing unto the marrow to the separation of soul and spirit. Try to figure out the difference between soul and spirit in the New Testament. Many theologians have tried. It's *energes*, the Greek says, it does what it says. This was really Luther's great insight. God's words are His works.

What does the word Jesus mean? Jesus. Yahweh saves in Jesus. And that name is the gospel. I tell you. Jesus is yours. Jesus is for you. Jesus died for you. Jesus lived for you. Jesus rose for you. Jesus. Jesus. Jesus. The Word is powerful. There are all kinds of miracles that Elijah performs in the Old Testament, and it really usually begins like this: "The word of the Lord came to the prophet Elijah." Elijah prays and calls down fire from heaven. "Let it be known this day that thou art the God in Israel and that I am thy

servant and that I have done all these things at thy word.” He prophesies against Ahab for taking Nabal’s vineyard: “Thus says the Lord, have you murdered and also taken possession of this vineyard? You shall speak to him saying, ‘Thus says the Lord: In the place where dogs lick the blood of Naboth dogs shall lick your blood, even yours.’”

He prophesies the death and the dogs licking up the blood of Jezebel. It happens. She’s the first defenestration in history. She’s thrown out the window, she dies, and the dogs lick it up. Why? Because it had been prophesied. The Word of God happens. God’s words are his works. This is what happened with Jesus. He was prophesied, promised, and it happened. Jesus came for the sins of the world. Every one of your sins, everybody’s sins in the whole world have been paid for. Nobody’s going to go to hell because their sins haven’t been paid for. The atonement has been made. As in the Old Testament, the high priest confessed the sins of the people onto the sacrificial lamb. On the day of Yom Kippur, the sacrifice was made, the blood was taken and sprinkled in front of the tent of meeting where the high priest met with the Lord and taken and sprinkled on top of the altar, on top of the ark of the covenant. Inside the ark were the two tablets of the Law and the blood covered it all. Yum Kippur, the day of covering. My friends, your sins are covered, past, present, and future. As Paul says in Colossians, when you get to heaven, there’s going to be no account against you. You’ll show up. Peter will say, okay, let me look at my files here. Oh, I’ve got quite a thick file on you. Let me just see what it says. Wait a second, I can’t make it out. It’s all blotted out. It’s all gone. It’s all blotted out in red ink. The blood of Jesus Christ, God’s son, cleanses us from all our sins.

Now the beautiful thing about God’s Word is its power. Right in our epistle text, right before the text says, the grass withers and the flower fades, but the word of the Lord endures forever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you. So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. Put it away. And even as God commands us to do that, the Word of God works in our hearts to recognize our own sins and repent. Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk. You are newborn infants in Jesus. Every moment, every day, your account is wiped clean. You are brand new. You are sinless in His sight, His own, that by it you may grow up into salvation. And indeed, if you have tasted, the Lord is good. The Lord is good. You’re going to taste it in just a minute.

The Lord forgives. He comes to forgive. He loves to forgive. He loves to have mercy. As you come to Him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious. he was rejected by men. Should you be surprised when you go through difficulties in life? Absolutely not. If it happened to Christ, it’ll happen to you. And yet you like Him are precious, a precious stone, a diamond, a jewel, a gem in his crown, his diadem. You are like living stones built up as a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood. You are holy and you have a priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifice. And what is it? Even as it’s spoken, it’s given to you. It’s your daily commission, you pray. The Lord invites you to pray to Him for all manner of needs and all manner of people. You praise Him because lips that have received Christ cannot but praise Him.

You do good works for your neighbor. You love your family. You take care of your children. You take care of your grandchildren. You see to the neighbor kids, you do good works of love and you speak the glorious name of Jesus to your neighbors. This name of Jesus is powerful. My friends, this is your secret weapon as spiritual priests. Some have said now and again that when laypeople speak the gospel, it’s not as effective as when pastors do so. That is complete rubbish according to the Bible and according to our Lutheran confessions, the gospel comes by the preaching of the word, the administrative administration of the Sacraments and the mutual conversation and consolation of the brethren. You are forgiven. Take that forgiveness with you in this world. Do not do the German thing like my family:

“Johnny, what’s the matter? Oh, well why did you do that? I told you last time not to do it. Oh no, Johnny, well just don’t do it again. Get out of here.” No gospel.

Say Johnny, you’re my beloved child. I can never not love you. I will always love you. No matter what you ever do in this world, I will always love you. I won’t ever stop loving you. And I want you to know I’m a sinner and I’m forgiven by Jesus and I forgive you your sins, and you are forgiven by Jesus. And in the speaking of it, it happens. Forgive your kids. I forgive you. Now you’re going to have to be grounded for a week, but I forgive you. You are a chosen race. There’s a new race. Race is nothing for us Christians. You look at the early Christian communities, they’re mixed races, they’re different people. The Cyrenians, there’s a guy named Niger. There’s the Libyans. There are a number of different people in the mix. Proselytes who are Jews and others. You are a chosen race.

You are together in this body of Christ with all Christians. You are a royal priesthood. Why are you royal? Because you are connected to Jesus. He’s royalty. He’s the King of kings. And the same thing God says to Him is said to you and your Baptism. This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased. Welcome to the royal family! And you are a priesthood. The power of keys, the keys belong to you as the church. Exercise those keys. Forgive open, forgive it, speak it, say it. It’s powerful when it comes across your lips. Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of Christ. Why don’t you speak it?

I tell you, Jesus forgives you. And that word carries the power to accomplish faith. You are a people for His own possession that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. You’re the Lord’s own precious possessions such as you are, sinner that you are. You are His precious possession. Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people. Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. You have received mercy. My friends, the Bible is written so that you can be absolutely certain that you’re going to heaven. It depends 100% on Jesus and 0% on you. It’s not your decision, it’s not your sentiment. It’s not the fervor of your faith, none of that. It’s Jesus. And when you trust in Jesus, you get everything that he has accredited to you. So therefore be certain: Jesus saves. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.