

---

# Sermon at Opening Worship

---

Martin J. Lohrmann

*Associate Professor of Lutheran Confessions and Heritage  
Wartburg Theological Seminary  
Dubuque, Iowa*

## Commemoration of James, Apostle

**Scripture Readings: Acts 11:27-12:3a;  
Mark 10:35-45**

**G**race to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ.

I attended the first International Loehe Conference here in Dubuque in 2005. I was a recent Wartburg Seminary graduate, had studied for a year in Neuendettlesau, and was thinking about doing a PhD in church history. So, I had good personal, pastoral, and academic reasons for coming to that first Loehe conference. And...I needed a change of scenery from my first call. I was going through a tough time early in my ministry; it was nice to return to a warm, *gemütlich* place like Wartburg.

I remember enjoying the conference. The keynote lecture by Hans Schwarz particularly stands out in my mind. The most transformative moment of the conference for me, though, happened in a conversation I had with Duane Manson, who was a local retired pastor and chaplain. I had gotten to know Pastor Manson a little when I was a student, and it was nice to see him again. If I remember correctly, at the time Pastor Manson was a little stooped in the shoulders, and maybe he had a squinty eye. He asked me how my first call was going. I was honest and told him it wasn't good. He smiled. Looking up at me, he pointed and said, "You know, Marty, you got options!" Those words were a Holy Spirit breath of fresh air and opportunity to me: I was not stuck or trapped. In Christ, we are free.

Pastor Manson died a few years after that. But I continue to cherish those words of apostolic freedom, and the twinkle in his eye that came with them. We who follow Jesus Christ have options. We have the chance to see life through God's eyes as a world of grace and beauty. We get to learn that real leadership means serving others from a spirit of love. We get to be like the prophets and disciples in Acts 11, who "determined that according to their ability, each would send relief to the believers" who needed help. And then they went out and did just that, and so can we.

---

**I**t's amazing to consider how Loehe and those who worked with him built up global missions, theological education, local social ministries, deaconess communities, and liturgical reforms that are still worth talking about 150 years after his death.

---

In Christ, we also know that faith and love sometimes come with opposition. What options do we have then? Today we remember the Apostle James. Unlike the accounts that Acts gives us of St. Stephen's trial and martyrdom, we don't know much about how things went for James the brother of John at the hands of King Herod Agrippa. Did the heavens open for him as they did for Stephen? Did he preach like Stephen did? We don't know. What we do know is that James followed Christ to the end, as Jesus had told him, "The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism that I am baptized, you will be baptized." The cup is Christ's Passover from death to life; his baptism is losing one's life to gain it. These are our sacraments, and these are our lives in Christ. They hold the same power and promise of life with God for us as they held for James and his fellow disciples.

We see this apostolic witness in the life and work of Wilhelm Loehe, a village pastor who it seems might have not had many options. What did he do? He looked and listened and prayed. He paid attention to a letter asking for help in North America. He noticed local needs in the community. He saw how women could support their communities more publicly. Inviting others to take part, he found creative, effective ways to address the challenges around him. It's amazing to consider how Loehe and those who worked with him built up global missions, theological education, local social ministries, deaconess communities, and liturgical reforms that are still worth talking about 150 years after his death.

While there's a tendency to fall into "great man" thinking about a unique leader like Loehe, he was assisted by people whose co-efforts made such things possible: Amalie Rehm at the deaconess house, his daughter Marianne, the Fritschel brothers and Augusta von Schwartz at Wartburg Seminary, Adam Ernst of the Missouri Synod, and many others. In Christ, at this conference, we remember all the saints before us, from the disciples, prophets, and apostles like James, to more recent figures like Wilhelm Loehe to those faithful people we have known in our own lives such as Pastor Manson.

Our time together these days in worship, fellowship, and learning provides a great opportunity to learn about the faith and love of those who went before us. We get to be inspired by their apostolic witness, learn from their mistakes, listen anew to the concerns of those around us, and find ways together to put our ideas into practice. Christ is faithful. He has already gone ahead of us, giving his life as a ransom for many. In him, we get to join in his heavenly mission to set people free from bondage and welcome them into the caring arms of our loving Lord. Amen.

---

**O**ur time together these days in  
worship, fellowship, and learning  
provides a great opportunity to learn  
about the faith and love of those who  
went before us.

---