

John 10:22-30/May 8, 2022

Alleluia! Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Grace and peace be with you from God our Father and our risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Have you ever made gumbo before?

The first thing you have to do is make a roux. You make a roux by using a fat of some kind, butter or the drippings from the meat you just cooked, and then you add flour and stir them together over medium heat until you get the color you want. Some recipes call for a dark roux and others light. So, if you want a dark stew, you need to cook the roux until it becomes dark. Once you have the roux at the color you want then you add the rest of your ingredients.

The roux is the base for gumbo, and other stews and gravy and things like that. When you make gumbo, it's the first thing you have to make. You can't make the gumbo without the roux. The gumbo is built upon your roux. Without the roux, you've just got a mess, trust me on that.

Now, I have made a lot of gumbo in my time, because we had two ELCA Youth Gatherings in New Orleans and we served gumbo at two fundraisers before the gatherings and two presentation after the gatherings. Now, I think I know what I'm doing, but the first time I made gumbo I was confused about what roux is, and because I was confused, I got someone else confused.

I thought the roux was the gumbo, not the first ingredient, and I made a mistake of telling one of the youth sponsors that with evidently too much authority in my voice, because after that first encounter, I could never get her to understand what the roux really is.

When I realized I had made a mistake, I changed how I was talking about making the gumbo, and even though I thought I explained to her that the roux is the base, she just couldn't hear me, and I got the youth sponsor all sorts of messed up, and I was getting super frustrated.

Round and round we would go - But you said this was the roux! And I was like, I know, but that's not the roux, this is the roux. The roux will become the gumbo. It's the base. Roux first and then gumbo, but she kept saying the gumbo was roux, and it became a huge mess. It was like "Who's on First" by Abbot and Costello.

No matter what I said, I couldn't convince her that the roux was the roux and the gumbo was the gumbo. And the harder I tried, the worse it got.

I suppose I could have just went back to calling things by the wrong name, the roux gumbo and the gumbo roux, but I knew that wasn't right and I just wanted her to know the truth, but she refused to listen to my voice when I told her the truth, and so I just had to walk away with her calling the gumbo roux.

She just couldn't hear what I was saying, even after I showed her the recipe and walked her through the recipe and explained what the roux was to do. The roux has a very important part in the recipe. You can't have gumbo without it.

In the Gospel reading we have for today, the Jewish leaders were having a similar kind of issue with Jesus. They had heard that the Messiah would bring in the Kingdom of God, an earthly kingdom ruled by a Jewish military leader, who would clear out all of the foreigners. That's what they heard a long time ago and that was the misinformation that kept getting spread. And no matter how hard Jesus tried, he could never get them to change their mind. They couldn't hear his voice. His voice wasn't even a voice they were listening for.

Similar to me trying to explain roux to the youth sponsor, Jesus kept trying to tell the Jewish leaders that they had it wrong. The Kingdom of God is about healing and wholeness for all of God's creation. It's about all people being taken care of. It has absolutely nothing to do with violence and war, except for being the exact opposite of it.

The Kingdom of God is about sacrificial love. The Kingdom of God is a shepherd who lies down his own life for the sheep in order to give them life – eternal life connected to God, the creator.

But, the only thing the Jewish leaders could hear was that the Messiah was coming to violently take Israel back from the Roman oppressors. That's the Messiah they were looking for. That's who they were listening for, so when Jesus talked, they just couldn't hear his voice, the voice of the true shepherd of God, the shepherd who is God.

And all of this happens on the Day of Dedication, aka Hanukkah, which is the celebration of the Maccabees retaking the Temple from the Greeks who had desecrated it with a statue of Zeus and the sacrifice of pigs.

They needed to burn the menorah for 8 days in order to consecrate the altar, and they only had enough oil for 1 day. The miracle was that they were able to burn the menorah for 8 days on one day's worth of oil.

The Maccabees were the Messiah type that the Jewish leaders at Jesus time were looking for. They were warriors that kicked butt and took names, but then their butts were kicked and their names were removed from the list of Kings. Clearly, violence is not the answer, so God turns everything on its head.

God says – This just isn't working. You guys just don't get it at all. Might does not make right. To be a King is to be a loving shepherd, and so Jesus, the good shepherd is sent and he is one with the Creator. He is God's "heart."

So, the Kingdom of God is not like any of the nations of the world, none of them. Because, the Kingdom of God has no boundaries. There are no walls or fences. There are no passports or check stations. The Kingdom of God is the one and only Kingdom, and it is for all people – no matter their nationality, their religion, their gender, their color, their wealth, or their whatever.

The Kingdom of God has no boundaries, so there are no wars to fight in the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is one, because a kingdom divided against itself cannot stand.

The Jewish leaders thought that the Messiah would usher the Kingdom of Israel into the world through violence, so they couldn't hear Jesus say – I am the Kingdom. Jesus is the Kingdom of God.

So, the Kingdom of God is personal and relational. The Kingdom of God is love. The Kingdom of God is healing and wholeness for everyone. The Kingdom of God is forgiveness and light.

The Kingdom of God takes violence and death and says – heck no! by resurrecting it into eternal life.

So, the Lord is more than just my shepherd. Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior is the Kingdom of God where water, food, safety, and love are given to absolutely everyone. There is no earning or deserving.

So, when our shepherd speaks, he speaks against all of the injustices of the world. They are of the kingdoms of this world, not the Kingdom of God.

And so as our shepherd leads us to green pastures and beside still waters, we remember that the enemies of the Kingdom are still all around us, and it's not that we can't hear them, it's that we don't follow them.

We know the voice of our shepherd, so we follow his voice of love, and the voice of love, the voice of our shepherd, the voice of God's Kingdom, calls us into the valley of death so that we can bring life into it.

Our cup is running over so that it can be shared with others, so that it can counteract the kingdoms of this world that preach hatred, greed, and selfishness.

As we clearly see in the resurrection, those things have no power in the Kingdom of God. Our shepherd leads us away from those things and into the love of our neighbors, who are more than just neighbors, they are our brothers and sisters, our own flesh and blood.

Jesus Christ is God's Kingdom. He cannot be divided. He cannot be killed. He cannot hate. He is love, forgiveness, and wholeness, and he is calling us out into the world to follow him.

So, in the worlds of the Franciscan blessing – May God bless us with restless discomfort about easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships, so that we may seek truth boldly and love deeply.

May we feel holy anger towards injustices, oppression, and exploitation, so that we can work for justice, freedom, and peace among all people. May we be gifted to shed tears with those who suffer from pain, rejection, starvation, or the loss of all they cherish, so that we can reach out our hands to comfort them and resurrect their pain into joy.

And may we be blessed with enough foolishness to believe that we can make a difference in this world, so that we are able, with God's grace, by the Holy Spirit, to do what others claim cannot be done.

May God bless us with ears to hear Jesus calling us to follow him, into those places where we may not want to go, assured by the Holy Spirit that just as Jesus and the Father are one, so we are one with Jesus.

Jesus is our one and only shepherd, the good shepherd, and we are the sheep of his fold. Jesus is the Kingdom of God.

Alleluia! Christ is risen. He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Thanks be to God. Amen.