

John 14:1-14

May 10, 2020 – Easter 5/Mother’s Day

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.

So, I was watching a TV show the other day. I can’t remember what show it was, but there was a line in it that really struck me.

One of the kids said to her mom, “You aren’t treating us all the same. It’s not fair.” To which the mother responded, “You’re right. I’m not treating you all the same. I’m giving to each of you exactly what you need, because you’re all different.”

That was interesting. As the younger of two children, I’ve always been very analytical of what is fair. “Is that fair?” “No. That’s not fair.” “But, that is fair.”

Fair. I guess that’s really in the eye of the beholder.

And I’ve come to realize that this is a common trait among the younger or two children. We all seem to be very concerned about justice. Not in the Judge Judy sense of justice, but in the “is it fair” sense of justice. Is everyone getting a fair shake?

I guess it must be because we’ve all been beaten up by our older sibling and seen them do things that we were too young to do. Fairness. And all of us younger of two have probably had our parents tell us, “Life’s not fair. Get used to it.”

But, I really liked that line, “I’m not treating you all the same. I’m giving to each of you exactly what you need.” It could have been in the TV show, “Mixed-ish.” I really like that show. I highly recommend it, and it has Mark Paul Gosselaar in it from “Saved by the Bell.”

But, that line really struck me with today’s Gospel reading when Jesus tells his disciples during the Last Supper that, “in my Father’s house there are many dwelling places.” There is a place for everyone.

And that part of John always reminds me of the joke about how this guy dies and meets St. Peter and they tiptoe by one of the rooms. The man asks why, and St. Peter responds, “That’s the – insert whatever denomination you want. They think they’re the only ones here.”

“In my father’s house, there are many dwelling places.” There is a place for absolutely everyone.

And, God comes to us in different ways, because we are all different, but at the center there is only one person who brings us all in, Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior.

As we like to say around Peace in Christ, our unity isn't in our denomination, it's in Jesus. Jesus is the one constant, but he comes to each of us in different ways depending on what we need. Just like our parents treat each of us differently depending on our own needs.

So, for those who need mercy, Jesus is resurrected and brings forgiveness. For those who need hope, Jesus is resurrected and brings life. For those who need healing, Jesus is resurrected and brings comfort. For those who are lonely, Jesus is resurrected and restores community. For those who are hungry, Jesus is resurrected and brings the fruit of eternal life. For those who are weak, Jesus is resurrected and bring strength. For those who are lost, Jesus is resurrected and teaches us of God's steadfast love.

To each of us, Jesus gives us what we need. We're not all treated the same, but we are all given the same gift – our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. God doesn't give us stuff. God gives us a relationship, and the beauty of a relationship is that relationships respond to our needs.

A car is nice, but you can't eat it. So to the one who is hungry, God gives food and to the one who needs to get somewhere God gives transportation. It's relational.

We are not all treated the same, because we are all different, so Jesus meets us wherever we are to give us whatever we need.

One of the activities that I've done at annual meetings before is to put up signs with each word of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. I then let people decide which word is most important or meaningful to them. The first time I did this exercise as a participant, I thought everyone would pick the same word, Lutheran, but they didn't.

I think the fewest people pick the word Evangelical. Lutherans don't seem to like that word. But for those who did, they shared about how Evangelical means "to share the good news of God's love in the world." And that's our purpose.

A lot of people like Lutheran. It's an identity thing. What church do you belong to? I'm Lutheran. And for some, "Saved by Grace through Faith" is the most important thing and that's what Lutheranism is about.

For others, Church is most important. We are the Church, the body of our Lord. We are the ecclesia, or gathering of the faithful. Church is what we do – we gather, praise God, and then go out to serve.

And the one that surprises me is In. I think most people take the In for granted. It's a short word. It doesn't seem to be that important, but In is important. We are in America. That is our ministry field.

And America. Ah. America. That is a loaded word. But, for our ancestors who came from other countries, America is really important. The land of opportunity. The land of religious freedom. The land that many of us have fought for.

So, there are 5 words in the ELCA. Which is most important to you?

And I apologize to our Episcopal siblings. I've just never done this exercise in the Episcopal Church, but there is a lot of meaning in that name as well. The Episcopal Church was called Anglican until the Revolutionary War. Anglican was just a little too British.

So is Episcopal or Church more meaningful? You can tell me during zoom coffee hour. I'd love to hear what you have to say.

And one of the cool things about the Episcopal Church, I have to do a shout out, is that it's not a theology like Lutheranism. The Episcopal Church is united by the Book of Common Prayer, because after Queen Elizabeth took over the throne, she wanted to be sure to keep all of the Roman Catholics and Protestants or Reformers together for the sake of unity.

So unity, not conformity, is very important in the Episcopal Church. Robin Williams is famous for saying, "You can believe whatever you want in the Episcopal Church, and you might even find one other person who agrees with you."

So being Peace in Christ Episcopal and Lutheran Congregation, it really is about our unity in Christ. Our peace is in Christ. Christ unites us, not each of our ideologies. And there's the kicker!

Christ unites us, not our ideology, and that's the case for everyone. That's why Jesus says, "In my father's house there are many dwelling places." There is a place for everyone, because it's not about what we believe, but God's great love for us. That's grace people! That's the good news we have to share in the world!

It really doesn't matter what we believe, it only matters that we are greatly and incomprehensibly loved by God, so Jesus takes us to our Creator. We don't go to God, God comes to us and takes us home.

If you tuned in on Wednesday to Morning Prayer, you heard me talk about Thomas Keating's poem #7, and I still don't have access to it. I need to get his book of poems. But, in that poem, Thomas Keating talks about how we need to cut the I out of I am and just be the am.

God is the I am, we are just the am. That's freeing, isn't it? I is very egocentric. We're not the I. God is the I in the I am. We are just the am, and there is so much freedom in just being the am – the created.

Jesus says, "I am the way." I'm not the way. You're not the way. Jesus is the way, he is the I. We're just the am.

And because we are the am, we are sent to do God's work in the world. We are chips off the old block after all. Jesus is the rock and we are the stones. Stones are what come off of the rock.

So, if you picture Castle Rock, that's a rock – big, strong, immovable. We are the stones, the bits that have fallen off the rock that can be moved to be of service in the world.

The rock is one, but we are many – many stones –and because of that we can do God's work all over the world. We, together, are the body of Christ. We are – all of us – in all of the separate dwelling places – the body of Christ – Jesus resurrected.

And maybe that word In is more important than I ever thought it was. As we stones have been scattered all over the place and are unable to gather together at 236 Tabor St, Elizabeth, for worship, that In has more meaning.

We have to be the Church in whatever location we are. We've been deployed. We are God's servants in our homes, in our online meetings, in the grocery store as we pick up necessities, in our conversations we have on the phone, in how we treat our neighbors.

And just as each of us needs different things, so each of us has different things to offer to the world. No 2 stones are alike. Trust me, I've been moving them into my back yard. We're all different. We're all different so that we can serve in different capacities.

God doesn't treat us all the same, because we're not all the same. Our needs are all different, and that's also why each of us is different - so that we can serve others differently. Our differences meet the different needs of others.

Our unity, not conformity, is in Christ. We're all different, and that's good!

In our father's house there are many dwelling places, so don't be worried. Trust God. Trust Jesus. And know that you are a beloved child of God.

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

Thanks be to God. Amen.