

John 17.1-11  
May 24, 2020

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

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

So, I think this is the weirdest Sunday of the entire Church year. This is the 7<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter, the Sunday before Pentecost and the Sunday after the Ascension.

So this Sunday is the in between times. This is the Sunday in between Jesus returning to heaven and the Holy Spirit being sent. So, it's a Sunday of absence, but at the same time it is a Sunday of promise and hope.

And so, for the Gospel, we have Jesus' final prayer with his disciples before he is crucified. Basically, Jesus is preparing his disciples for when he will no longer be with them. In a continuation of last week's Gospel, Jesus is again reiterating that we will never be orphaned. We are protected, part of a larger family, and we have eternal life, because we know God. Those are all gifts of the Holy Spirit. Just check the third article of the Creed – Nicene or Apostles. Today it's the Nicene.

So, today is the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of my Baptism. As a 4 month old I was taken to Holy Trinity in Westminster and baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. My parents took me there and we were joined by their friends, our family, and an entire congregation of people that I didn't know, not that I really knew anyone outside of my family at the time.

But, all of those people who were gathered together on that day promised to share the gifts of the Holy Spirit with me, just as I was marked with the cross of Christ and sealed with the Holy Spirit forever.

Now, the vast majority of the people who promised to share the gifts of the Holy Spirit with me, I never saw again, or they never saw me again. I didn't know them and we don't have a relationship. But, their promises are still valid, because they made those promises on behalf of the entire Church – the entire body of Christ – because just as God is one, so all of us believers are one as well.

So, when someone is baptized at Peace in Christ, we make promises to them on behalf of the entire community of believers that we will share Jesus with them, because through Jesus we know God, and that relationship is what gives us eternal life.

Baptism is relational. Eternal life is relational. In baptism we are united in Jesus' death and resurrection, and because of that we know God and are adopted into God's family. In that relationship we have with God, we are tied with all believers

through all times and in all places – every corner of the world, and beyond, and all time – past, present, and future.

We are one as God is one, and we are united with God, because of relationships. God is relational, we're relational, and it's in those interactions that we have life.

So, while Jesus is away, and before the Holy Spirit is sent, the disciples go back to the upper room and they pray. They talk to God. They keep the relationship going with God as they deal with the physical separation from Jesus, and they wait with hopeful expectation for the Holy Spirit's arrival.

Although, once again, they have no idea what's going to happen to them. They will be sent out to share God's good news with the entire known world, starting in their own little neck of the woods, but John will be the only one to die of old age.

Last Tuesday at text study, we talked about how we deal with people being separated from us. Some read the Ascension text and were sad, even though in Luke it says the disciples were joyful. They just couldn't understand how the disciples could be happy with Jesus leaving, even though he promised to send the Holy Spirit.

And, that made me think about the olden days, way back before there were even telephones. I think we're in such a different head space than the disciples were. We have instant interaction with people all over the world through phone lines and satellites, but in Jesus' day all they had were letters that took weeks to get across the Roman Empire. So there was a lot of time just waiting to get some news and by the time it arrived it was long outdated. But, there was still a connection in the midst of separation.

On Facebook, someone had put up a post about Ascension Day tying it in with our current situation. "To those who wonder about the Feast of the Ascension, that's the day when Jesus started working from home." And so I asked if Zoom is the Holy Spirit. I didn't get a response, but Zoom is that connecting force that unites us with one another, kind of like how the Holy Spirit unites us with God and each other.

The Holy Spirit unites us in love, reminding us of God's love for us and for everyone else. In love for others, especially with those whom we do not know, God is known, and that's what makes baptism and the promises of the congregation so meaningful. Baptism isn't just about the one getting baptized, it's about the entire community – the whole Church.

We are baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, which makes us one. And, with the cross of Christ marked on our foreheads, we know God's eternal love and our connectedness, which is our protection from all fear.

Sonja Renee Taylor brings up a very good point in her book, “The Body is not an Apology” - fear and danger are not the same thing. Fear is being afraid of the unknown. Danger is a totally different animal. Danger is life or death.

We are not set free from danger, but we are set free from fear, because in baptism we have eternal life. We know God, and God knows us. So, as long as we are in a relationship with God, which is guaranteed in our baptism, we have nothing to fear. Our past, present, and future are all tied up in God’s great love. God was with us, is with us, and will always be with us.

And that’s what Peter is getting at in his letter. What is happening to us right now is nothing new and it’s not something that no one else has ever experienced before. Through the Holy Spirit, we are connected with others who have gone through this before, and that should give us hope. All this stuff that’s going on is only temporary, but God and God’s love for us is eternal.

With all that is happening right now, I’m beginning to think that we’ve become really soft. I mean, this pandemic isn’t a war or anything. We do not have bombs blowing up in our neighborhoods. This is a virus. Put on a mask and stay 6 ft apart. It’s really not that difficult. And this is only temporary. In the grand scheme of things, this really hasn’t been that long.

I put up an announcement on FB about Water World being closed this summer – 1 summer out of 41. One of my friends commented, “oh – the poor kids – they are going to suffer this summer.” Now, I’m not sure if that was an ironic remark or not, but all I could think of was, “if this is suffering, then tell me what you call what is happening to those poor kids on the Border who are locked up without their families.” #firstworldproblems

What is happening to us right now is not strange. It’s nothing new. And, how we react to it should not be strange. Our reactions and actions should still be done in love. It really matters how we treat others in the midst of Covid 19. It matters, because of the promises we made as the greater church to everyone who has ever been or ever will be baptized.

We have promised to share God’s love with them, to share the Holy Spirit with them, to share life with them. We fulfill our promises that we made to people we never see by living out those promises with the people we do see, because in Christ we are all one. We’re all connected. We are the body of Christ. So maybe that love can’t be spoken through the mouth, but the hand can wave, or the eye can wink, or the feet can walk along beside.

So we treat those we do not know as if they are the ones we dearly love, because they are loved – by God and by our entire community. Through the Holy Spirit, we are the representatives with whom they interact. So do acts of love for others,

even if you think it's silly. That's why Paul encouraged the believers in Corinth to not eat meat sacrificed to an idol, even though they know the idol is fake. It's an act of love for those who do not understand what is happening.

Lately I have heard a lot of people say, "I don't care if I die from Covid 19. I want to go do...." Fill in the blank. But there are 3 issues there. It's not that you might die, but that you might infect someone else who might die. That's murder. That's the opposite of life. That's number 1.

And following #1, 1b if you will, because it's really not separate, is the idea that those who died and are dying have some sort of underlying condition so it's ok for them to die – the culling of the herd mentality. Get rid of the weakest. Friends – that is Social Darwinism. That's the mentality of the Nazis, and this weekend we remember all of those healthy young people who died to defeat Nazism.

As Christians, we hold that all life is valuable. No life is more important than another. That's why Jesus went to the outcasts and brought them life. So we, especially as Lutherans, will absolutely in no way shape or form have anything to do with Social Darwinism. A perfectly healthy population is a myth. And as a biologist I will share with you that within our DNA are genes that are not being expressed. Genes that we may need at any time, so the last thing we need to do is cull the herd to a "perfect specimen." That is a blatant misuse of Darwin's theory in order to make racism, ableism, and ageism acceptable, and it's not. According to God, it's not, because Jesus died for everyone. Everyone! You cannot put a price on a life and no one is more valuable than anyone else.

#2. I worked an entire summer at the University of Colorado Hospital, when it was over at Colorado Blvd, in the ICU and I've been a pastor going on 13 years. In my tenure, I've heard people say they're not afraid to die until the moment comes when they are put on a ventilator. Death is ok in the abstract, but when it's staring you in the face, it's a whole different matter. Our basic instinct, which is hard wired into us, is to live, not die. That's why if someone is talking about killing themselves, you know that something is wrong. We are made to live. God knows that. God created us.

And, we live eternally by being in loving relationships with God and others, including those we do not know or those we don't even like, because they also are united in God, and thereby we are united to one another. So, what we do to them, we are actually doing to ourselves. We are the body of Christ.

And I'd like you to take a look at the list of disciples in Acts 1:13 – Peter, John, James, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James (not Iscariot).

A bunch of them were fishermen, and a couple of them were brothers, but the fact that Matthew, a tax collector, and Simon, the Zealot, were disciples of Jesus together should be making our ears ring. You cannot talk more opposite extremes than these two. Matthew worked for the Romans and Simon wanted the Romans destroyed, and yet they both followed Jesus together, along with a whole diverse cast of characters, including women.

If that rag tag group could be made one in Christ, then there is absolutely no reason that we should be divided by Christ. Christ is all about unity and restoring relationships. That's why one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is the forgiveness of sins. Forgiven, we are made right with God, so that we can go be made right with one another, and live in the unity of Christ. "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us."

The cross is like a black hole that is sucking everyone in, whether they want to be or not, because it's not about what we do, but about what God is doing. And God is making all things right. That's why many of us were brought to the font as infants, as testimony to the fact that God is acting here and now through our relationships, our interconnectedness, in order to bring all people eternal life – that is truly knowing God and God's amazing love for all of creation.

Through baptism, we proclaim that we are a people of hope.

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

Thanks be to God. Amen.