

Sermon 20200517 Easter 6 A

***Grace to you, and peace from God our Father...
....and the Lord Jesus Christ.***

I miss church!

How could you miss church, Pastor?

You are standing in one...

...even as you preach!!

And, as most of you know...

...the answer to that question is...

....CHURCH is not the BUILDING!

Oh, how ALL OF US have been reminded of that...

....in profound ways....

....in the past weeks!

If I had known on March 8th...

....(the last time I gathered with the part of Christ's Body...

....that gathers in Lebanon, TN)....

...that I would possibly not see them again for 12 Sundays...

....the handshakes and hugs....

...and “*how do you do?’s*”

....would have been SO much more fervent.

The emptiness of this room...

....only heightens the sense of aloneness and separation...

....from the people I am called to serve.

I am sure many of you are experiencing the same feelings.

I.Miss.CHURCH!

Today’s Gospel from John 14...

....is a very important word to the church.

In my New Revised Standard Version Translation...

...this section is headed: “*The Promise of the Holy Spirit.*”

*And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another **Advocate**, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides **with you**, and he will be in you.*

One of my favorite commentaries...

...is The Peoples' New Testament Commentary...

...by Eugene Boring, and Fred Craddock.

They write about this passage from John...

.... and who Jesus is addressing:

*As in Acts chapter 2, and First Corinthians 12, the expression refers primarily to the presence of God's spirit in the **community**; individuals participate in the life of the spirit, not on an **individualistic** basis, but by **belonging** to the community of faith, animated and guided by God's Spirit. The pronouns and verb forms are in the plural throughout.*

So the 14 "you's" in just seven verses of today's Gospel passage...

...are referring to the community—the church.

This gift of the Spirit...

....is a gift to the church...

...a gift to ALL of US TOGETHER!

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A second thing to note about this passage...

...of Jesus promising the Spirit...

....is how it happens in the midst of Jesus describing...

....the interconnectedness between...

...the community keeping his commandments...

...and loving him.

Loving Jesus and keeping his commandments....

...go hand in hand.

But more important...

...is that this whole passage is not just set in...

...a speech laced with lots of love language.

This is that FOOT WASHING scene.

It is in that same room...

....where Jesus has given his disciples...

...(INCLUDING one who is about to betray him...

...and one who will deny him...

...and ALL who will abandon him)...

.... a NEW COMMANDMENT:

*that you love one another. Just as I have loved you (**all of you who will do these hurtful things to me in the next few hours**), you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”*

This promise of the Spirit...

...is set in a scene of LOVE in ACTION!

Jesus, has taken the role of a house slave...

...and has reversed the order of hierarchy and privilege.

“So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet.” ...

...Jesus tells his disciples and us....

...a very few verses before today’s Gospel reading.

The Greek word, PARACLETE....

....that gets translated in the NRSV as “Advocate”....

...means: “the one who is called alongside.”

Jesus promises...

...to send one to us...

...to THE CHURCH...

...to accompany us in the MISSION OF GOD...

..to which **Christ's Church** is summoned.

We are not summoned by God...

.. to sit on the gift of the Spirit that God has given us.

We are not summoned by God....

....to JUST WAIT until Jesus returns...

...and watch over and guard the Spirit in our buildings.

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I was on a ZOOM call....

...just this week....

...with pastors from the community where I serve.

The local Chamber of Commerce...

...had thought it would be a good idea...

...for us to share our experiences...

....with adjusting to not gathering....

....as well as our plans for starting back again.

There was cordial conversation....

....and some updates on the work in our community...

...to respond to the March 3rd tornadoes....

.... that ripped through Middle Tennessee...

...(with our town being in the direct path).

One of the pastors of a pretty large non-denominational church...

...made a comment on the good work...

...our community churches were doing together:

“Jesus Christ died...

...to make this church.”

Perhaps because us Lutherans...

...and other denominations that observe the liturgical year...

...are still in the “week of weeks”...

...the SEVEN SUNDAYS of the Easter Season...

...I immediately thought:

“No, pastor. Jesus did not DIE to make this church.”

Jesus ROSE from the grave....

...to MAKE THIS CHURCH!

Jesus defeated DEATH once and for all...

...to give LIFE to THIS CHURCH!

We are an “Easter” people...

...because we are **Resurrection** people.

As The Rev. Dr. Anna Madsen reminds us...

... in her book: I Can Do No Other:

*“We are Christians, called therefore to be ambassadors of Christ and of all that his **resurrection** confirmed: healing, feeding, serving, welcoming, teaching, and forgiving.”*

In other words...

....that Advocate that is our gift...

...**accompanies us** when we push back against death...

....and circumstances and systems....

....that oppress, and are not life-giving...

...and imprison those whom God created **in love**...

....in God’s image.

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“If you love me you will keep my commandments.”

“Love God.”

“love your enemy.”

“love your neighbor”

“love one another.”

In the same way Jesus...

... has reversed the order of hierarchy and privilege....

...when he took on the role of a servant.

....our church is called to do that...

...in this very day and time.

For too long....

....we have—at best—turned a blind eye to...

...and—at worst—participated in...

...systems that oppress and cause suffering to our neighbor.

At the 2019 Churchwide Assembly...

...where I participated as a voting member...

...our church....

... the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America...

...took steps to repent, and at least begin the conversation...

.... to address the issue of racism in America.

- I witnessed our church's [public apology titled](#): "Declaration of the ELCA to People of African Descent."acknowledging that racism and white supremacy are deeply rooted in [our] nation's history of slavery, and that the church is complicit.

- We adopted a [resolution](#) condemning white supremacy.
- And we adopted a [resolution](#) to establish June 17 as “Emanuel 9 Day of Repentance,” to remember those killed in the Mother Emanuel Church in Charleston, SC

I was proud of our church...

...for pushing back against death, in those forms...

...for those children of God who have lived and suffered...

...under those systems for centuries.

But today...

....our church has an opportunity...

...to claim the presence and accompaniment...

.... of the Advocate....

...that Jesus promised, and that his resurrection DELIVERED...

...NOT in a collective statement of repentance...

..but in a collective ACTION of LOVE.

A little over a week ago...

...people all over our country were stunned...

....to learn of the murder of Ahmaud Arbery...

....who was murdered in Brunswick GA...
...by two white men...
...while jogging.

Our Southeastern Synod Bishop, Kevin Strickland...

....has issued a pastoral message...

...in which he reminds us:

*“There is never anyone—whose face we look into—
....that we do not see the very Face of God.*

We are gifted AND entrusted with “the Spirit of truth”...

....and this is a time for the church...

...to speak truth to power...

...to speak on behalf of those who have no voice...

...and on behalf of those...

...whose voices are not listened to **when they speak**.

Speaking out in an action of love...

.... is our chance to remind ALL Christians....

...that “faces of God,” come in widely diverse representations...

...but that GOD sees all of them...

..and EACH of US...

...in God’s image...

...AND that Paraclete—that Advocate...

...is sent to collect ALL of us into relationship...

...with our creator and our redeemer.

I invite you—especially in this season of Resurrection celebration...

....to be in prayer **and** be in action....

...to love your neighbor...

...to love each other....

...to love God...

....who loves you mightily.