

Seventh Weekend of Easter (RCL/B)

1 John 5:9-13; John 17:6-19

May 15-16, 2021

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

“I would never have guessed this is where I’d end up,” said a new friend I recently met. He’s currently a part-time pastor also working as a security guard, formerly an employee of IBM. He explained how he once was a person who didn’t darken the door of a church and would’ve headed in the opposite direction of anything even vaguely faith-related. But God changed his heart somewhere along the Way. In response to this story about the unexpected turn his life took, I said, “That’s like our Gospel this last week. The Lord Jesus says, *“You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last.”* (John 15:16) Which also brings to mind our Creator’s words to and through the prophet Jeremiah: *“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born, I consecrated you....”* (Jeremiah 1:5)

Same here. God knew **us** before we were conceived, consecrated **us** before we were born. Then in Holy Baptism we were joined to our Lord Jesus’ death and resurrection, set apart as God’s priestly people, deputized to intercede for the world, to proclaim the Good News of Jesus’ saving death and resurrection, to serve as human mediators of God’s divine love. That’s our job! And it’s a full-time job, even if you have another full-time job, even if you’re retired, even if you’re a kid. It’s the full-time job of all the baptized wherever we go, whatever we do, to tell people about the enormity of God’s love, the unendingness of God’s mercy, the living, death-defying resurrection hope and faith-that-holds-up-under-fire that are ours in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

If we existed as a faith community only to serve those who are already here, we'd be a country club not a church. **We are here for those who aren't here yet.** This weekend we celebrate the formal arrival of lots of wonderful new members of all ages! We've asked them why they're choosing to join our faith family and their basic answer is that they've found a welcome here. Their presence has been noticed and they've been embraced. Pastor and staff extended a welcome, but if the people in the pews didn't initiate or reinforce that hospitality, those who arrived as visitors wouldn't have stayed around. So thank you, members of the family on pew level (and out there in the lawn chairs at 10:30!), for recognizing those who are more newly arrived and saying, "We're glad you're here."

We're glad you're here because your voice expands our praise and your hands extend our outreach. We're glad you're here because you bring a wealth of experience from other places, an awareness of ministries and ministry styles of which we're unaware, a fresh perspective and a challenge that just because "we've never done it that way before" doesn't mean that we can't do it another and new way going forward! The time, talent and treasure you bring enriches our Life Together and enables us to preach the Gospel, when necessary using words, telling people about the enormity of God's love, the unendingness of God's mercy, the resurrection hope and faith that are ours in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

In today's Gospel Jesus speaks to the Father in Heaven, summing up His ministry on earth by simply saying, "*I have made known your name....*" (John 17:6a) That means our Lord Jesus introduced His Father to the people, by talking about Him, describing Him, and acting like Him. Have you ever had the experience of somebody calling your home, hearing you answer and mistaking you for somebody else? "You sound just like...." People say that about my sister Sally and me, and sometimes Kristiane and me. "I can't tell you apart on

the phone!” In a way, we can’t tell Jesus and His Father apart, because Jesus did everything possible to sound like, to mirror His Father. Remember when Philip says, *“Master, show us the Father; then we’ll be content.”* Jesus answers, *“You’ve been with me all this time, Philip, and you still don’t understand? To see me is to see the Father.”* (John 14:8-9a)

What we know of the Father through the beloved Son, Jesus, is that our God is:

- Liberator of the possessed, like the Gerasene demoniac out of whom Jesus cast a “Legion” of evil spirits
- Healer of the sick, like the 10 lepers
- Restorer of sight to the blind, like Bartimaeus
- Advocate of the poor, like the widow putting her mite in the Temple treasury
- Acceptor of the despised, like Zacchaeus the tax collector
- Forgiver of the sinner, like the woman caught in adultery and the good thief on the cross next to His.
- Raiser of the dead, like the son of the widow of Nain and Lazarus.

So all of that is what we’re supposed to do, too. By God’s grace, with the help of the Holy Spirit, we’re supposed to speak and act like Jesus, so that through us the world will know God’s enormous love and unending mercy, recognizing the Source of our faith, hope and love as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. **We** are to make God’s name known, as our Lord Jesus did. **That** is why our community of faith exists.

In order to do this, we must be one. Our Lord’s heartfelt prayer the night before He died was precisely this:

“Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.” (John 17:11b)

Despite all our differences, all our varying opinions about worldly matters, we must be spiritually united in our understanding of God’s call to our community: that we speak and act like Jesus, so that through us the world will know God’s enormous love and unending mercy. Those who suffer in this world will best know God’s mercy and love through our outreach. And we will only be inspired, strengthened, consecrated for that outreach

through our worship together, through our frequent reception of the means of grace: receiving the sacrament of **Holy Communion** and receiving the **Word of God** -- not just hearing it but dwelling in it, imbibing it, letting it be the life-giving oxygen we breathe and the nourishing soil into which we sink our roots. Then we will be, in the beautiful language of Psalm 1, assigned for this weekend, *“like trees planted by streams of water, bearing fruit in due season, with leaves that do not wither; everything they do shall prosper.”* (Psalm 1:3)

“You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last.” This weekend and ongoingly we thank God for the gift of new sisters and brothers joining our faith family, growing our fellowship in the Gospel. I read something recently in which new people are described “like a skin graft applied to a wound -- ...[adding] health to the whole body.” The author adds, “Without growth we [turn] inward quickly, caring for our own little holy club while the world around us [burns]. But a desire to see new people come to faith in Christ and membership in the church [keeps] us listening.”¹ He quotes another author who wisely notes, “God speaks to the church by whom God sends to the church.”² Thank You, God, for these brothers and sisters whose presence blesses us. Thank You for all the ways in which they will benefit from and contribute to our ministries. Thank You for the ways in which they will challenge us to become more and more like You, that we faithfully may make Your name known at this time ,in this place, on our watch. Amen

¹Jason Byassee, “Not All Growth Is Good,” *Lutheran Forum* (Winter 2019, pp. 56-62), 58.

²Cited in Byassee, op cit., from Methodist Bible study *Experiencing God*.

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