



Pastor Gwen's Message Sunday, May 17, 2020

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
AMEN

Christ is Risen.....He is Risen Indeed! Alleluia!

This past Wednesday was my last confirmation class for the year with Lyla. We have been meeting via facetime every Wednesday since the pandemic got going. We were finishing up her memory work of the Lord's Prayer this week so we got to talk about "Save us from the time of trial. And deliver us from evil". Lyla asked how does that work and what does it really mean. I tried to explain that as it says in the Small Catechism, God does not tempt us ever, but that the devil and the world are always around trying to mislead us into sin. And so we ask God to help us keep from doing evil. He does this by sending the Holy Spirit to us. Our discussion continued and I tried to describe who the Holy Spirit was. For a teenager, the Holy Spirit is a difficult concept, a difficult part of the Trinity to understand. One way that it almost makes sense is to a young person is to think of the Spirit as the still small voice that keep us in check, keeps us from doing something we know is wrong.

How do you think about the Holy Spirit? The Spirit seems to get the short end of the stick, if you will, when we talk about God. It is much easier to talk about God as the creator and Jesus as the redeemer, instead of the Holy Spirit as the sanctifier. As Lutherans we are often remiss in talking about the Spirit. Yet, the Holy Spirit is not some obscure supporting character in the scriptural narrative. As Christ tells us, even though we cannot see Him, He is the abiding presence of God in our lives. The Spirit brings us a moral compass that is perfectly aligned with the will of God, because, He too is God.

In our Gospel reading today from John, Jesus tells us that God, the Father, will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever." This reading takes place at the Last Supper as Jesus is trying to prepare His disciples for what is coming; his crucifixion. He begins by talking about love and links it to obedience. Then he promises to give us the Holy Spirit, who will become God's presence with us on a daily basis in this world. The actual word John uses here is *parakletos*, which has been translated as

Advocate, Councilor, Comforter and Intercessor. But even those words do not do justice to the original word.

Jesus says that He will have His Father send “another” advocate. Jesus here is referring to the fact that the Father sent Him to earth to walk among us, so that we could come to know God through Him. He is an Advocate as well. And so how do we know that the Advocate, we call the Holy Spirit, is still working in our lives today?

In times like we are experiencing today, we may not feel the Spirit of God around us as we watch or listen or read the unending news about COVID 19 on the TV or any other electronic media platform. We find it hard to see or hear the presence of God all the time when faced with such scary circumstances as a pandemic.

At our baptism, the Holy Spirit descended on us, just as He did during Jesus baptism in the river Jordan. A white dove did not fly out of the ceiling at our baptism, but the promise of the Holy Spirit was with us, coming to us in the waters of baptism. We pray during the sacrament of Holy Baptism that the Holy Spirit poured out on each of us, will give us new birth, cleanse us from sin and raise us to eternal life. The Holy Spirit is a gift from God and this promise of God is given to us as we are marked with the cross of Christ forever.

Today in the Gospel of John we hear clearly that the Holy Spirit will be in us and remain there forever. So yes, the Holy Spirit is still present in all of us. No matter how frightened or alone we feel, no matter how much we feel abandoned or how weak or powerless we believe we are, the Spirit is still here, in our hearts.

During difficult times, sometimes we feel like we are separated from God, but He never goes anywhere. He is always in me and in you, available to us. God is there to protect us and provide for us, as we are his treasured possessions, His beloved children. So as Scripture tells us, we will not be orphaned. Jesus makes that promise. He will be with us always through the presence of the Holy Spirit. So we never have to be scared or feel unloved.

I did hear from several of you that you really liked the story about the little boy going to live with his Aunt that I told last week. Well, you are in luck, because I found another story by Rev Billy Strayhorn that is wonderful for today’s message.

There was a nature show on television about a black bear that gave birth to two cubs. One cub died right away. Three weeks later the mother bear died and the remaining cub was left to fend for itself. An orphaned cub in that condition is like a

walking buffet for predators. And of course the camera immediately showed a hungry-looking mountain lion.

One day the orphan cub encountered a giant male black bear. The little cub cowered at the bear's sheer mass. The larger bear peered around and seemed to realize that the mother bear wasn't anywhere to be found. He gave the little cub a friendly nudge. The camera then showed the little bear happily trailing along after the larger one. The adoption papers were signed, sealed and registered at the county seat in that nudge. Papa bear proceeded to show the cub how to grub for insects and how to catch fish and how to scratch his back against a tree.

One day the two bears became separated. The cub began to cry and looked frantically for his new father, but couldn't find him anywhere. The cub approached a stream where he'd learned to fish and something caught his attention. He looked up to see a mountain lion ready to pounce. That same mountain lion had stalked the cub for the entire show. There was no way that mountain lion would've gone for that cub with Papa bear around, but now.....

The camera zoomed in on the cub. He automatically mimicked the posture of his adopted father when threatened. He stood on his hind legs and bared his teeth. Then, in exactly the same way his new father would have done, this cub let loose a mighty growl that should have reverberated throughout the forest. But, only a tiny bear cub squeak came out.

Well, you know what was coming. But, to everybody's astonishment the mountain lion lowered his head and ran off in the opposite direction.

The camera panned back to the proud little cub still standing tall on his hind legs. And then all the viewers saw what that little cub could not; a few yards behind him, at full, ferocious height, his sharp, white teeth bared in a snarl, stood Daddy bear. He may not have made sound, but he was there.

And even though the cub couldn't see his father, his father stood guard, protecting his young. The little cub had power available greater than anything he could produce on his own. There was a greater power watching over him.

And so, it is with the Holy Spirit. We may not see or hear the presence of the Spirit all the time, but He is still there. Even when all we can see are the eyes of the mountain lion, or COVID 19, God is always with us. God will always love us. **AMEN**