Pastor Robert Nagy

Unity Lutheran Parish

Malta Lutheran and Whitewater Lutheran

Sixth Sunday of Easter, May 14, 2023

Gospel Reading John 14:15-21

Greetings! Isn’t it great to gather for worship. We can’t take being gathered together for granted. Three years ago, when we looked at these scriptures on the 6th Sunday of Easter, it was a different time.

If we look back, some churches had started gathering together, but at a safe distance, about 6 feet from each other or every other pew. Some churches were still streaming the service over the internet or on Facebook, or another platform. Three years ago, some people struggled with sheltering in place and felt lonely. No matter how we responded, we tried to live out “love your neighbor as yourself”. We tried.

This year we can gather. This year many can celebrate Mother’s Day together as a family. Happy Mother’s Day for all. Some have created a family in other creative ways and will get together. What a gift.

So here we are. To remind us, this week’s gospel lesson is a continuation from last week where Jesus promises to prepare a place for us and bring us there where he is. Now this week is the challenge to live out loving God and loving our neighbor. But this week Jesus tells the disciples they will not be alone or orphaned in the New Revised Standard Version.

Everyone’s idea of being alone or orphaned is different. I find this story amusing.

A cartoon in the Saturday Evening Post showed a young boy about five or six years old talking on the telephone, he says, "Mom is in the hospital, the twins and Roxie and Billie and Sally and the dog and me and Dad are all home alone." (1)

“…the twins and Roxie and Billie and Sally and the dog and me and Dad are all home alone." That is hilarious. In every family there is usually one person who is that central person in whom we see as the core or central person. Without them, life is just not the same. Many of us feel that without Jesus in our life, we are alone. From our gospel reading today.

“16And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. 17This 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.”

We would think these are words of comfort for the disciples, they will not be orphaned, or abandoned. At this time in the disciple’s life, they have left everything to follow Jesus. They have known him for a few years. They trust or are beginning to trust that he is the Messiah. They may have a different understanding what that means, but they were following their Rabbi. Many scholars consider this scripture as part of Jesus’ farewell discourse. I can only imagine the questions and possible fear the disciples may have felt. Yet the Spirit of Truth is promised to them.

When Christ is with us, when the Advocate guides us and we listen, we are better witnesses for Christ.

17This is the Spirit of truth … You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

There was a college student who spent a year living with a group of Navajos as part of his doctoral studies. As he did research on and with the Native Americans, he lived with members of this one Navajo family. He slept in their home, ate their food and worked side by side with them every day. As much as was possible, he tried to live as one of them.

The old grandmother of the family spoke no English and the student spoke no Navajo and yet a close relationship developed between the two. They spent a great deal of time together. Despite the language problems, they shared a common understanding of love and friendship. And of course, over the months, they each learned a few phrases from each other.

When it came time for the young man to return to college, the tribe held a going away celebration for him. The next day, as he prepared to get in his pickup and leave, the grandmother came to tell him good-bye. With tears in her eyes, she said, "I like me best when I'm with you."

We can say the same thing about our relationship with Jesus, "I like me best when I'm with Jesus." Jesus said He "would not leave us orphaned." And when we are with Christ, Heart and Soul, we ARE the best we can be.(2)

Just as many of us will not take “being gathered together” for granted again, to live out our love for Jesus in the world, it is a response to God loving us first as we are reminded in 1 John 4:7-8.

“7Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 8Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.”

Once we are reminded and are comforted that God in the Spirit of truth is with us and guiding us, we can live out loving Jesus by also loving others.

When others do things that go against our beliefs, they become very difficult to love. And yet, Jesus tells us that loving others is what he expects of us. Love is the essence of our faith. It is to be unconditional, sacrificial and never ending. But, let’s be honest, there are times when loving others is not easy. If we’re honest, with some folks it’s hard to get to “liking,” much less loving!

Take for example a story of the Berlin Wall that had just been erected in Germany. In the early days of the famous Wall, hostilities flared when truckloads of stinking garbage were dumped from East Berlin into West Berlin. Many residents wrote to the mayor demanding revenge for this offense, but he responded in a unique way. He asked the people to gather all the flowers in West Berlin and bring them to a certain place at the wall. Then as a great avalanche of beautiful and fragrant flowers was poured over the wall, a large banner was raised. Written on the banner were the words: "We each give what we have." (3)

So, we know the Holy Spirit lives within us, abides in us, we know that Christ has “given us what he has”, and when we live out the love of God, we too can say, "I like me best when I'm with Jesus."

Every day, every minute, we are loved, and God is with us.

I trust every promise from God, in Jesus, in the Spirit of truth, we are not alone.

Amen

Notes

*1. Billy D. Strayhorn, From the Pulpit, CSS Publishing Company, Humor: We Are Home Alone*

*2. Billy D. Strayhorn, From the Pulpit, CSS Publishing Company, The Best Relationships*

*3. Keith Wagner, Who Said Loving Others was Easy? Loving others, (from Jerry Fuller, OMI, Deacon Sil)*

(Stories are from a subscription resource, Sermons.com)