



Liturgical Day: The Day of Pentecost

Date: May 15, 2005

Sermon Title: Peace, Go, Forgive

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

We've been waiting on this day for a long time, haven't we? Some of us have been waiting six or eight months. Others of us have been waiting three years. Yet others have been waiting for thirteen or fourteen years. We've been waiting on this day for a long time, and now it has arrived: the day when these eleven young people will come forward in the church where some of them were baptized (How many of you were baptized at Saint Peter?); the day when these eleven will approach the altar where they have received the body and blood of Jesus Christ for many years; the day when they will affirm the promises God has given them in their baptism, the day when they will affirm the faith their parents have sought to share with them; the day when they will affirm their desire to live as faithful, active, supportive members of this congregation.

Let me tell you: we are glad for your desire to do this. We don't necessarily assume that you'll want to. We hope you will, of course. That is why your parents have worked so hard, since promising God at your baptism that they would share their faith with you. That is why so many adults who are not even part of your own families put so much time and energy into this ministry – they, too, want you to have a faith that is vibrant and alive. They, too, want you to know what it is like to live life with God at the very center. So we certainly hope you will want to be included in this day. We don't necessarily assume that you will. We know that for some the time is just not right, or the interest is just not there. We honor and respect their choice not to be part of this program, or complete the entire course. And we pray that the day will soon come when it is the right time for them to be involved too. But that makes us even more pleased that you are here this morning, and we are thrilled for you as you begin your journey as adult Christians in this church.

You are about to embark on the most exciting, fascinating, fulfilling journey you will ever know. There are countless people who will try to tell you otherwise. There are those who will try to tell you that real living has to do with taking drugs or having sex. There are those who will try to tell you that real living has to do with making lots of money. There are those who will try to tell you that real living has to do with being a great athlete, or a great scholar, or a great artist. There are those who will try to tell you that real living has to do with having a lot of power or authority. There are those who will try to tell you that real living has to do with all these different human experiences. But do you know what? They're wrong, because real living has to do with just one thing: it has to do with giving God the central place in your life, and living as a faithful follower of Jesus Christ. God is the only one who knows what real living is. You see, God created us. God knows what makes us tick. God knows what our hearts really need. And when God is at the center of our lives instead of these other desires, our living is completely transformed. We become partners with God in gracing and blessing the world – in reaching out to those who need the presence and power of God in their lives – and to be part of that effort, well there is nothing in the whole world that is as exciting or as fascinating or as fulfilling, no matter what anyone else tries to tell you.

Now don't get me wrong. I'm not saying some of these things can't be part of your lives. Doctors will proscribe drugs for you that can bring you back to health and make you well again. Many of you will find a partner to share your whole life with, and you'll express your love for that person with this beautiful and powerful gift from God that we call sexuality. Some of you will make a lot of money, and make use of it in ways that

FIRST LESSON

**ACTS 2:1-21**

OR

**NUMBERS 11:24-30**

PSALM

**PSALM 104:25-35, 37**

**(NRSV: PSALM 104:24-34, 35B)**

SECOND LESSON

**1ST CORINTHIANS 12:3B-13**

OR

**ACTS 2:1-21**

GOSPEL LESSON

**ST. JOHN 20: 19-23**

PRAYER OF THE DAY

**GOD, THE FATHER OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, AS YOU SENT UPON THE DISCIPLES THE PROMISED GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, LOOK UPON YOUR CHURCH AND OPEN OUR HEARTS TO THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT. KINDLE IN US THE FIRE OF YOUR LOVE, AND STRENGTHEN OUR LIVES FOR SERVICE IN YOUR KINGDOM; THROUGH YOUR SON, JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD, WHO LIVES AND REIGNS WITH YOU IN THE UNITY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, ONE GOD, NOW AND FOREVER. AMEN.**

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please God. Some of you will be great at sports or studies or art, and you'll glorify God by doing your very best at these activities. Some of you will be in positions of power or authority, and you'll put that power to work in ways that promote peace and justice and righteousness.

But there are people who don't know God – who haven't experienced a relationship with Jesus Christ – who think these are the most important things in life. They'll dedicate their every effort to achievement in these areas. And they'll always be disappointed, because involvement in these activities is not why we have been made. We have been created to live in relationship with God. We have been created to live as witnesses to what God is doing in this world. Those of you who begin this adult portion of your life's journey with a strong and growing faith will know what this means. And what a blessing this is to us and to those around us. I'm so excited for you. I can't wait to watch how you live that out among us. And I can't wait for you to come back and tell me stories about what God is making possible in your lives.

Those are my words for you. But God has some words for you today too. (You knew that, didn't you; those of you who have been turning in sermon notes for three years? You knew that I would want to share with you a word from God this morning, because this is a sermon, and sermons are all about sharing God's word with God's people.) God has some words for you today. As a matter of fact, God has three words for you. They are these: Peace, Go, and Forgive.

## **Peace**

There is this little song that we sing at the end of every Catechism workshop – we sang it last night at the end of the banquet celebrating your faith – who knows what it is? It is, *May the Peace of the Lord*. How does that go? It's a song that comes right out of this morning's Gospel lesson. It is a song that is grounded in the words that Jesus shared with his disciples just after he was crucified and raised from the dead. He knew that the road ahead was going to be hard for his followers. He knew that the same people who were threatened by him would be threatened by them. So he gave them the gift of God's peace. Three times, he said: "Peace be with you." (Twice in today's Gospel, and once in the section that follows it). This gift would allow them to be at peace, even when the whole world seemed determined to destroy them. This gift would allow them to share their faith, even in situations where it could well cost them their lives.

Jesus gave that gift to them the last time they met, and he gives it to you today. Most Middle Schools are hard places to live out your faith. You may not be killed for being a Christian, but it won't make you the most popular kid in the class. In today's Gospel lesson, though, Jesus promises to be with you, and to give you the strength and wisdom you need to stay faithful through even the most difficult of times. This promise can give you a peace, that nothing else can give. A peace that allows you to be signs for others of what God is up to these days. So leave today knowing that: God loves you; enough to die for you. And God will be with you no matter what happens. Don't be afraid to live as a disciple of Jesus. Have peace in your heart. God, who is strong enough to defeat death itself, is on your side.

## **Go**

God says to us, "Peace." God also says: "Go." If you've paid any attention at all these past years, you know that the Christian life is not just about us. We don't worship or read the Bible or develop a strong prayer life just for what we might get out of it. We worship and study and pray in order to strengthen our ability to make a witness to the world around us. In today's Gospel, Jesus says: "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." Jesus shows us the reason God wants us to know peace in our hearts. At peace with ourselves, and at peace with God, we are sent to reach out to the world the way Jesus first reached out to us.

I've heard you talk about your Catechism experience, and I know that for many of you, the favorite piece of it all was the time you spent on servant events. During those activities, you weren't so interested in what you might get out of it. You were interested, instead, in making a difference in the lives of others. We're all very proud of you for that. And you have given us a glimpse of what it means to be sent by God to make a difference in the world. Thanks for that.

## Forgive

God says to us: "Peace" and "Go." God also says: "Forgive." The central image of our faith is that of Jesus, dying on the cross, so that you and I might experience God's forgiveness. This is God's greatest gift to us. And once our hearts have been touched by God's forgiveness, we find ourselves empowered to share that same gift with others.

It is sad that in so many past instances the church has not been a center of forgiveness. Church members have too often been hijacked by their own self-indulgent interests and haven't been able to reach out to one another with love and grace. There are those who look at the church from a distance and wonder just how committed to forgiveness it might be.

But let's not allow it be that way among us. In your faith essays, you have shared with me your belief in the radical nature of God's forgiveness. Don't ever forget about that. Remember that no matter how terrible your sin might be, God longs to forgive you and renew you. And remember that no matter how terrible someone else's sin might be, God longs to work through you so that they might experience forgiveness.

So there it is: let your hearts be fixed on the peace that is yours in Christ. Know that God sends you to make a difference in the world that surrounds you. And let that radical gift of forgiveness shape every relationship that you experience. And I'll guarantee you: your experience as an adult Christian will be the most exciting, fascinating, fulfilling journey you will ever know.

[Oh by the way, those others of you who are here and not seated in these two front rows: those words are for you as well as them. Peace. Go. Forgive. May God be with you all. Amen.]

David J. Risendal, Pastor (May 17, 2005)

English Text: <sup>i</sup>

<sup>20.19</sup> When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." <sup>20</sup> After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. <sup>21</sup> Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." <sup>22</sup> When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup> If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." <sup>ii</sup>

Greek Text:

<sup>20.19</sup> Οὐσης οὖν ὀψίας τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἐκείνῃ τῇ μιᾷ σαββάτων καὶ τῶν θυρῶν κεκλεισμένων ὅπου ἦσαν οἱ μαθηταὶ διὰ τὸν φόβον τῶν Ἰουδαίων, ἦλθεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς καὶ ἔστη εἰς τὸ μέσον καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς· εἰρήνη ὑμῖν. <sup>20</sup> καὶ τοῦτο εἰπὼν ἔδειξεν τὰς χεῖρας καὶ τὴν πλευρὰν αὐτοῖς. ἐχάρησαν οὖν οἱ μαθηταὶ ἰδόντες τὸν κύριον. <sup>21</sup> εἶπεν οὖν αὐτοῖς [ὁ Ἰησοῦς] πάλιν· εἰρήνη ὑμῖν· καθὼς ἀπέσταλκεν με ὁ πατήρ, καγὼ πέμπω ὑμᾶς. <sup>22</sup> καὶ τοῦτο εἰπὼν ἐνεφύσησεν καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς· λάβετε πνεῦμα ἅγιον· <sup>23</sup> ἂν τινῶν ἀφήτε τὰς ἁμαρτίας ἀφέωνται αὐτοῖς, ἂν τινῶν κρατήτε κεκράτηνται. <sup>iii</sup>

<sup>i</sup> A list of Bible lessons for the coming weeks is available at [http://www.elca.org/dcm/worship/church\\_year/lectionary.html](http://www.elca.org/dcm/worship/church_year/lectionary.html).

<sup>ii</sup> St. John 20:19-23, *New Revised Version Bible* (© 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America).

<sup>iii</sup> St. John 20:19-23, *The Greek New Testament*, Aland, Kurt, Black, Matthew, Martini, Carlo M., Metzger, Bruce M., and Wikgren, Allen, (© 1983, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft Stuttgart).