



Liturgical Day: The 22nd Sunday after Pentecost

Date: November 5, 2006

Sermon Title: Partners for the Journey

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

Pastor Steve Holm was one of my best friends when I was serving a congregation in the Phoenix area. You may have heard of him: he served at Our Saviour Lutheran Church in Casper, Wyoming for many years before joining us in Phoenix. Steve is a strong church leader: an excellent preacher, a solid theologian, he has great interpersonal gifts, he is very trustworthy... and he's a pretty good racquetball player.

That's how we spent our time together. Back in the days before Betsy and I had children, and in the days after Steve's kids were grown and gone, we used to get together two mornings a week at 7:00 a.m. to play racquetball. It was the strongest workout I've ever had in my life. We'd stretch a bit, warm up by hitting the ball against the back wall for five or ten minutes, and then absolutely go after each other, *pedal to the metal*, for 45 minutes or more. Our games would often go into overtime, and both of us were too stubborn to ever give up. Consequently, we ended up in pretty good shape.

We ended up in pretty good shape because it was hard work. But we had another thing going for us. We never skipped. Occasionally schedules would get out of control and we would miss a day or two. But for the most part it was two days a week all year long. I knew that if I didn't show up, he'd be sitting there waiting for me. So even on those days when I was too tired to exercise, or too busy to make time for it – I went anyway, so I wouldn't leave Steve hanging at the court.

When there is something important to us – like exercise – and we know the temptation to skip it will eventually come along, it is very helpful to have someone who is there to support you, and help you to stay true to your hopes and intentions. Athletics is a natural, because so often you either need a team or an opponent or both. But we see that in other areas of life as well:

- Those who are fighting addiction find it invaluable to attend AA or NA or AlAnon meetings, where they can find others who are also seeking sobriety.
- Students are aware of a variety of reasons why study groups can help them succeed in their studies.
- At work, teams are often formed to accomplish tasks – and in the best of situations, team members encourage and challenge one another in a way that strengthens the outcome.
- Large deliberative bodies, like a Congregation Council or a Legislature, will spin off smaller work groups when there is a specific task that needs to be done.

We are aware of how important this dynamic is here at Saint Peter. That is why we encourage everyone to meet regularly with a small group or a faith partner, to help them continue working on their faith lives, and growing in their commitment to live as a disciple of Jesus Christ. When it is working well, a small group or a faith partner can be an incredible resource for someone who wants to grow in grace and in faithfulness.

My guess is that there was a time when this used to happen more naturally. I imagine a time when people lived around neighbors, most of whom shared their faith and their values. I imagine communities where people were born, lived and died in the same neighborhood. (My father experienced this. Other than a brief stint in the military, he spent his whole life in Stillwater, Minnesota. When he died, two months short of his 75<sup>th</sup> birthday, he had recently been golfing with men he had known for some 50-60 years.) In that context, much of what we hope to make happen through small groups

LESSON

REVELATION 21:1-6A

GOSPEL LESSON

ST. JOHN 11:32-44

PRAYER OF THE DAY

**ALMIGHTY GOD, WHOSE PEOPLE ARE KNIT TOGETHER IN ONE HOLY CHURCH, THE BODY OF CHRIST OUR LORD; GRANT US GRACE TO FOLLOW YOUR BLESSED SAINTS IN LIVES OF FAITH AND COMMITMENT, AND TO KNOW THE INEXPRESSIBLE JOYS YOU HAVE PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE YOU; THROUGH YOUR SON, JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD, WHO LIVES AND REIGNS WITH YOU AND THE HOLY SPIRIT, ONE GOD, NOW AND FOREVER. AMEN.**

9300 E. BELLEVIEW AVE.  
GREENWOOD VILLAGE,  
COLORADO 80111

VOICE  
(303) 770-9300

FAX  
(303) 770-9301

WEB  
[WWW.STPLC.ORG](http://WWW.STPLC.ORG)



and faith partnerships took place naturally, between friends and family members.

However, we live in a different time. A time when many of us live hundreds of miles away from the nearest family member. A time when it isn't uncommon for families to move every three or four years in the early phase of a career. A time when the pace of life leaves precious little time to sit around and get to know friends very well. In our world, there is a distinct lack of community. People are very independent. In fact, it is possible to live in a neighborhood these days and never meet anyone who lives near you. We live with a warped sense of what community is all about. Our culture is afflicted with an unhealthy tendency towards individualism. People tend to think, "what's best for me" instead of, "what's best for us."

There are reasons why people are drawn to individualism: it frees us from the messy business of dealing with each other day after day after day. One who is completely self-sufficient has no need for confession & forgiveness; no need to depend on anyone else; no need for the compromises and middle ground we always find ourselves seeking in relationships. The motto of the community-less world of some of our contemporaries is: "Don't tell me what to do, and I won't tell you what to do."

In Biblical times, people knew much better. They were more acutely aware of the power of community. Much of the Old Testament is hard for us to understand, because it assumes that a commitment to the common good is valued more highly than a commitment to one's own private interests. In Biblical times, the community shaped a person's values and beliefs. The community helped watch out for one another's young. (It takes a village, right?) The community knew that if one of its members was suffering, the entire community suffered. And so they stood by one another, in good times and bad, and weathered the storms together.

We have a glimpse of that in today's Gospel lesson. It is St. John's account of the death and resurrection of Lazarus, a good friend of Jesus. Lazarus died while Jesus was away. When he received word that Lazarus had taken ill, he finished his business where he was, and headed for Bethany. When he arrived there, he saw Mary and Martha, the sisters of Lazarus. But when Jesus saw them, he didn't find them holed up in their homes, surfing the internet for web sites to cheer themselves up. No, he found them in the midst of a large crowd; a crowd of people who were weeping together, and mourning the loss of this brother and dear friend. When they traveled out to the tomb to pay their respects, they didn't do so alone. A whole crowd went with them; they went together – as a community.

There is power in that kind of community, and we want you to know that power. We want you to know what it is like to have a group of friends who support you in challenging times: who pray with you before surgery, and come see you in the hospital; who offer to watch your kids when you are not feeling well; who are aware of special needs you might have around the house and willing to help with them.

We also want you to know what it is like to have a group of friends who celebrate with you in joyful times: who remember you at birthdays and holidays; who are there to congratulate you and cheer you on when you accomplish something significant; who will simply enjoy a play or a movie with you.

Even more so, we want you to know what it is like to have a group of friends who are seeking to grow in faith with you; who will challenge you and hold you accountable when you need it; who will ask the hard faith questions with you, and look for answers with you; who will pray for your spirit, and your faithfulness; who will turn to God's word with you, and wrestle with what it means for us to live as followers of Jesus Christ today.

That's what it means to have community. The kind of community that Mary and Martha and Lazarus knew in Bethany. The kind of community that we know can make such a difference in our lives today. It is easy to seduce ourselves into imagining that we are too busy to establish those kinds of roots. The opposite is true: rooted in a solid faith community, we are strengthened and freed to accomplish so much more.

This morning, I want to challenge you to think about how you want to be involved in a small group or a faith partnership here at Saint Peter. There are some questions on page 13 of your *Habits of the Heart* booklet that I'd like you to take some time with. Let's do that right now, together.

*[Provide time for everybody to turn to their books and answer the questions.]*

Thank you for taking time to do that this morning. Living a life that is faithful to Jesus Christ is not easy. It is hard to do alone. I hope that each one of you is able to find a small group or a faith partner who can share the journey with you, and encourage you along the way.

Let me leave with you with this one question:

**QUESTION OF THE DAY:**

Are you willing to become part of a small group or a faith partnership? And to open yourself up to that relationship in a way that helps to shape your faith, and guides you in discerning God's will for you?

Amen.

David J. Risendal, Pastor (November 5, 2006)

English Text: <sup>i</sup>

<sup>32</sup> When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." <sup>33</sup> When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. <sup>34</sup> He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." <sup>35</sup> Jesus began to weep. <sup>36</sup> So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" <sup>37</sup> But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"

<sup>38</sup> Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. <sup>39</sup> Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days." <sup>40</sup> Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" <sup>41</sup> So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. <sup>42</sup> I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me." <sup>43</sup> When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" <sup>44</sup> The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go." <sup>ii</sup>

Greek Text:

<sup>32</sup> Ἡ οὖν Μαριάμ ὡς ἦλθεν ὅπου ἦν Ἰησοῦς ἰδοῦσα αὐτὸν ἔπεσεν αὐτοῦ πρὸς τοὺς πόδας λέγουσα αὐτῷ· κύριε, εἰ ἦς ὡδε οὐκ ἄν μου ἀπέθαιεν ὁ ἀδελφός. <sup>33</sup> Ἰησοῦς οὖν ὡς εἶδεν αὐτὴν κλαίουσαν καὶ τοὺς συνελθόντας αὐτῇ Ἰουδαίους κλαίοντας, ἐνεβριμήσατο τῷ πνεύματι καὶ ἐτάραξεν ἑαυτὸν <sup>34</sup> καὶ εἶπεν· πού τεθεικάτε αὐτόν; λέγουσιν αὐτῷ· κύριε, ἔρχου καὶ ἴδε. <sup>35</sup> Ἐδάκρυσεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς. <sup>36</sup> ἔλεγον οὖν οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι· ἴδε πᾶς ἐφίλει αὐτόν. <sup>37</sup> τινὲς δὲ ἐξ αὐτῶν εἶπαν· οὐκ ἐδύνατο οὗτος ὁ ἀνοίξας τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς τοῦ τυφλοῦ ποιῆσαι ἵνα καὶ οὗτος μὴ ἀποθάνῃ;

<sup>38</sup> Ἰησοῦς οὖν πάλιν ἐμβριμώμενος ἐν ἑαυτῷ ἔρχεται εἰς τὸ μνημεῖον· ἦν δὲ σπήλαιον καὶ λίθος ἐπέκειτο ἐπὶ αὐτῷ. <sup>39</sup> λέγει ὁ Ἰησοῦς· ἄρατε τὸν λίθον. λέγει αὐτῷ ἡ ἀδελφή τοῦ τετελευτηκότος Μάρθα· κύριε, ἤδη ὄζει, τεταρταῖος γὰρ ἐστίν. <sup>40</sup> λέγει αὐτῇ ὁ Ἰησοῦς· οὐκ εἶπον σοι ὅτι ἐὰν πιστεύσῃς ὄψῃ τὴν δόξαν τοῦ θεοῦ; <sup>41</sup> ἦραν οὖν τὸν λίθον. ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς ἤρην τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς ἄνω καὶ εἶπεν· πάτερ, εὐχαριστῶ σοι ὅτι ἤκουσας μου. <sup>42</sup> ἐγὼ δὲ ἤδην ὅτι πάντοτε μου ἀκούεις, ἀλλὰ διὰ τὸν ὄχλον τὸν περιεστώτα εἶπον, ἵνα πιστεύσωσιν ὅτι σύ με ἀπέστειλας. <sup>43</sup> καὶ ταῦτα εἰπὼν φωνῇ μεγάλῃ ἐκραύγασεν· Λάζαρε, δεῦρο ἔξω. <sup>44</sup> ἐξηλθεν ὁ τεθνηκὼς δεδεμένος τοὺς πόδας καὶ τὰς χεῖρας κειρίαις καὶ ἡ ὄψις αὐτοῦ σουδαρίῳ περιεδέδετο. λέγει αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς· λύσατε αὐτὸν καὶ ἄφετε αὐτὸν ὑπάγειν. <sup>iii</sup>

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

<sup>ii</sup> St. John 11:32-44, New Revised Standard 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 11:32-44, The Greek New Testament, Aland, Kurt, Black, Matthew, Martini, Carlo M., Metzger, Bruce M., and Wikgren, Allen, (© 1983, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft Stuttgart). To display the Greek text correctly, choose Palatino Linotype font.