



Liturgical Day: The Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Date: August 30, 2009

Sermon Title: Welcomed and Sent

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

I've been reading a book by Professor Eric Gritsch called "The Wit of Martin Luther." Gritsch makes the case that Luther actually was a very funny man. I am intrigued by the way the book begins. It describes a person with a sense of humor as someone who understands that reality is sometimes just too hard – that there are times when life really doesn't make sense. But mature people learn to laugh at it. They look at the ridiculous situations they are in and realize that the only way through it is to laugh at it, acknowledge that it doesn't make sense, and then begin working on how to move on. Luther faced many things that made no sense at all, and Professor Gritsch would have us believe that Luther was as successful as he was, in part because of his sense of humor.

Luther laughed a lot about the craziness of this world. I don't know if Jesus laughed a lot about the state of the world in his day, but he faced a situation that was similar to what Luther faced. Jesus struggled on a regular basis with people who were wedded to religious behavior, but whose hearts were cold to God. This morning's text bears that out – especially the sixth and seventh verses.

Jesus is dealing with Pharisees and Scribes who were upset at his disciples for not fully obeying the Jewish ceremonial laws. But Jesus sees through them, and realizes that although they are sticklers for the law, their hearts aren't right with God. He challenges them directly, and tells them that performing proper ceremonies and following the traditions of the church are not what the life of faith is all about. It is, instead, using ceremonies and rituals to do what is far more important: allowing your heart to be touched by the power and presence of God. Jesus isn't concerned about what ceremonies people honor. He is concerned about what kind of affect those ceremonies have on a person's faith; on a person's heart.

We are concerned about that here at Saint Peter as well. Many Lutheran churches – really, many Lutherans – these days, are just going through the motions. But we don't want to be like that. Our hope is to be different. Our hope is to be a church where nobody can just go through the motions. We want to be a church that helps you and me to fall in love with God, to live with hearts that are full, and to commit ourselves to sharing God's grace with the world.

That is why our leaders recently created a new mission statement for the congregation. It is:

Welcomed and Sent

Maybe some of you remember that when Pastor Bill Selby was with us, he challenged us to come up with a mission statement that we could repeat at gunpoint. Anyone have trouble remembering this one? Let's try it together. What is the Mission of Saint Peter Lutheran Church? We are:

Welcomed and Sent.

Very good. Let's try that again. The people of Saint Peter Lutheran Church are:
Welcomed and sent.

I think you're getting it. So let's fill it out a bit. I'm guessing that most of you will be able to remember those two words the next time someone draws a gun on you and asks for our mission statement. But if you want to explore it a bit

FIRST LESSON
DEUTERONOMY 4:1-2, 6-9

PSALM
PSALM 15

SECOND LESSON
JAMES 1:17-27

GOSPEL LESSON
ST. MARK 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

SEMICONTINUOUS SERIES:
SONG OF SOLOMON 2:8-13
PSALM 45:1-2, 6-9

PRAYER OF THE DAY
O GOD OUR STRENGTH,
WITHOUT YOU WE ARE
WEAK AND WAYWARD
CREATURES. PROTECT US
FROM ALL DANGERS THAT
ATTACK US FROM THE
OUTSIDE, AND CLEANSE US
FROM ALL EVIL THAT ARISES
FROM WITHIN OURSELVES,
THAT WE MAY BE PRESERVED
THROUGH YOUR SON, JESUS
CHRIST, OUR SAVIOR AND
LORD. AMEN.

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Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

further, we've provided some direction for that. You probably saw these words above the door as you came in this morning, and you will see them above the door as you leave:

***The People of Saint Peter Lutheran Church
Welcomed into God's Love
Sent into God's World***

That gives us a bit more context. By becoming connected with Saint Peter, we want to extend a welcome to you. Not just to our gatherings. Not just to our friendship. Not just to a pleasant experience. But we are bold enough to believe that by gathering with us, you will be welcomed into God's love. And then, with full hearts, we are sent. Not just to go home and watch television. Not just out to the store, or up to the Bronco's game. But we are sent into God's world – sent to those whom God loves, and who need (like we do) the love of God. Welcomed into God's love. Sent into God's world. That's the context of this mission statement.

Let's take it one step further, and describe what the context looks like:

***The People of Saint Peter Lutheran Church
Welcomed into God's Love... just as we are
Sent into God's World... to be a reflection of Christ's love***

So let's talk a bit about what that means for us.

Welcomed

When I first moved to Denver, I met a man who belonged to an exclusive fly fishing club on the South Platte River, just downstream from the fabled Wigwam Fishing Club. One day, when he had a meeting in his house on the river, he invited me to join them for breakfast, and then head out fishing while they worked. While I was on the river, another member of the club happened upon me. Assuming I was trespassing, he looked me up and down and said to me with obvious disdain, "Who are you?" The meaning was clear. He suspected that I was nobody. He doubted that I belonged where I was. He was about to run me off.

Our purpose here is exactly the opposite. Saint Peter is not an exclusive faith club, that only the most qualified can join. Instead, Saint Peter is a congregation that seeks to be as radically welcoming as Jesus himself was. Our human tendency is to organize clubs that, non-coincidentally, always include us, and usually exclude others. God's tendency is to break down those walls that we so often erect, and extend the sphere of grace to those whom we often would hesitate to reach. We want to build this church on God's desires. We want to be welcomed into this community *just as we are*, and we desire to welcome others into this community, *just as they are*.

In his letter to the Romans, the Apostle Paul wrote these words:

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ... God proves love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.ⁱ

Did you hear that? "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." It is an indication of how much God loves us, and of how radical God's grace is. Even before we could imagine receiving it, much less deserving it, Christ died for us. Not expecting us first to achieve some minimum spiritual standing, God died for us, just as we are. And so this is a congregation that seeks to welcome people – to welcome you and me – just as they are; just as we are. Our openness – our commitment to welcome others – should be every bit as radical as God's own love. We are welcomed into God's love. We are welcomed into forgiveness. We are welcomed into renewal. We are welcomed into a community where we can be nurtured and strengthened. No matter how smart we are, how wealthy we are, how powerful we are, how handsome we are... not matter who we are, we are fully welcomed into this community just as we are.

And for what reason? To be sent.

Sent

ⁱ Romans 5:1, 8, 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).

We are sent into God's world, to be a reflection of Christ's love. Welcomed into God's love, filled with God's Spirit, strengthened and encouraged by the time we spend together, we are sent to go and make a difference. Every one of us. For the past few years, we have embraced these final words from Matthew 28 as our mission statement:

Jesus said, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."ⁱⁱ

As disciples of Jesus Christ, you and I share a common mission. He has commanded us that we must go – we must leave this place, and help other people to become disciples of his as well. In all that we say and in all that we do, our lives are to become an invitation for others to fall in love with Jesus, to experience God's radical grace, and to become a part of this family of faith we call the Christian Church.

In the months that lie ahead, we will be talking about this new Mission Statement. We'll be exploring how in all of our ministries, in all of our programs, in all of our activities, we can experience God's radical welcome into a transforming and sacred love, and become vehicles of that love, as we reach out to the world around us. As we consider what that can mean for our ministries, I hope you will consider what that might mean for your own lives. And together, we'll do our best to be an expression of God's grace in this world.

When confronted by the Scribes and Pharisees, Jesus lamented that too many people in his day were just going through the motions – practicing religious rituals that never quite made an impact on their hearts. Today's text calls you and me to give thanks for the ways he has opened our own hearts to God, and say yes to the ways he is calling us to help others to receive that same grace.

That, friends, is our mission. I'm pretty excited about that. And I hope you will be too. Welcomed and sent. That's what it means to be God's people. And, God willing, that's what it means to be a member of Saint Peter Lutheran Church.

Amen.

David J. Risendal, Pastor (August 30, 2009)

Gospel Lesson; English Text:ⁱⁱⁱ

^{7:1} Now when the Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around him, ² they noticed that some of his disciples were eating with defiled hands, that is, without washing them. ³ (For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they thoroughly wash their hands, thus observing the tradition of the elders; ⁴ and they do not eat anything from the market unless they wash it; and there are also many other traditions that they observe, the washing of cups, pots, and bronze kettles.) ⁵ So the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, "Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?" ⁶ He said to them, "Isaiah prophesied rightly about you hypocrites, as it is written, 'This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; ⁷ in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines.' ⁸ You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition."

¹⁴ Then he called the crowd again and said to them, "Listen to me, all of you, and understand: ¹⁵ there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile."

²¹ For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, ²² adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. ²³ All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."^{iv}

ⁱⁱ St. Matthew 28:19-20, 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).

ⁱⁱⁱ A list of Bible lessons for the coming weeks is available at <http://www.elca.org/Growing-In-Faith/Worship/Lectionary.aspx>

^{iv} St. Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23, 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).

Gospel Lesson; Greek Text:

7:1 Καὶ συνάγονται πρὸς αὐτὸν οἱ Φαρισαῖοι καὶ τινες τῶν γραμματέων ἐλθόντες ἀπὸ Ἱεροσολύμων. ² καὶ ἰδόντες τινὰς τῶν μαθητῶν αὐτοῦ τι κοινὰς χερσίν, τοῦτ' ἔστιν ἀνίπτοις, ἐσθίουσιν τοὺς ῥτους ³ οἱ γὰρ Φαρισαῖοι καὶ πάντες οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι ἐὰν μὴ πυγμῇ νίψωνται τὰς χεῖρας οὐκ ἐσθίουσιν, κρατοῦντες τὴν παράδοσιν τῶν πρεσβυτέρων, ⁴ καὶ ἀπ' ἀγορᾶς ἐὰν μὴ βαπτίσωνται οὐκ ἐσθίουσιν, καὶ ἄλλα πολλά ἔστιν παρέλαβον κρατεῖν, βαπτισμοὺς ποτηρίων καὶ ξεστῶν καὶ χαλκίων [καὶ κλινῶν]– ⁵ καὶ ἐπερωτῶσιν αὐτὸν οἱ Φαρισαῖοι καὶ οἱ γραμματεῖς· διὰ τί οὐ περιπατοῦσιν οἱ μαθηταὶ σου κατὰ τὴν παράδοσιν τῶν πρεσβυτέρων, ἀλλὰ κοινὰς χερσίν ἐσθίουσιν τὸν ῥτον; ⁶ Ὁ δὲ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς· καλῶς ἐπροφήτευσεν Ἡσαΐας περὶ ὑμῶν τῶν ὑποκριτῶν, ὡς γέγραπται [ὅτι] οὗτος ὁ λαὸς τοῖς χεῖλεσιν με τιμᾷ, ἡ δὲ καρδία αὐτῶν πόρρω ἀπέχει ἀπ' ἐμοῦ· ⁷ μάτην δὲ σέβονται με διδάσκοντες διδασκαλίας ἐντάλματα ἀνθρώπων. ⁸ ἀφέντες τὴν ἐντολὴν τοῦ θεοῦ κρατεῖτε τὴν παράδοσιν τῶν ἀνθρώπων.

¹⁴ Καὶ προσκαλεσάμενος πάλιν τὸν ἄλλον λεγεν αὐτοῖς· ἀκούσατε μου πάντες καὶ σύνετε. ¹⁵ οὐδὲν ἔστιν ἕσθωθεν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου εἰσπορευόμενον εἰς αὐτὸν δύναται κοινῶσαι αὐτόν, ἀλλὰ τὰ ἐκ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐκπορευόμενα ἔστιν τὰ κοινῶντα τὸν ἄνθρωπον.

²¹ ἕσθωθεν γὰρ ἐκ τῆς καρδίας τῶν ἀνθρώπων οἱ διαλογισμοὶ οἱ κακοὶ ἐκπορεύονται, πορνείαι, κλοπαί, φόνοι, ²² μοιχεῖαι, πλεονεξίαι, πονηρίαι, δόλος, ἀσέλγεια, ὀφθαλμὸς πονηρὸς, βλασφημία, ὑπερηφανία, ἀφροσύνη· ²³ πάντα ταῦτα τὰ πονηρὰ ἕσθωθεν ἐκπορεύεται καὶ κοινῶντα τὸν ἄνθρωπον. ^v

^v St. Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23, The Greek New Testament, Aland, Kurt, Black, Matthew, Martini, Carlo M., Metzger, Bruce M., and Wikgren, Allen, (© 1983, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft Stuttgart).