

Devotions – August 2-8, 2015
Pastor Jim Wendt
Our Savior Lutheran Church, Marinette, WI

Sunday, August 2, 2015

Text: Mark 16:1-8

When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. They had been saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?” When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, “Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.” So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

This story is about proclaiming the good news of the resurrected Jesus Christ to all of the people of a broken world. Those who were the closest to Jesus went to the tomb to continue the burial practices by anointing his body, but instead, found the stone rolled away leaving an empty tomb. The tomb was not exactly empty... there was a young man dressed in white proclaiming the good news to those who came looking for Jesus. This angel type person instructed those who were looking for Jesus to go and tell the disciples and Peter that Jesus has been raised from the dead. However, fear and terror consumed them and kept them from sharing the joy and good news of the risen Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord.

Fear, fear can consume any of us if we let it... There is the fear of the unknown. When we are with people who look and act differently than we do that the level of fear within us can rise. When we go to places that may look and feel unsafe the fear level in us can rise. Recently, I led a group of eighteen youth and adults from our congregation to the National Youth Gathering in Detroit. During my planning for this incredible experience, I encountered a few youth who were fearful of going to Detroit. Some of their fears were about leaving home, meeting new people, going to a large city that has received much negative press. Many times the fear of the unknown can keep us from doing what God wants us to do... Proclaim! Sometimes God calls us to go into parts of the world to proclaim the good news of the risen Jesus. Like those in the tomb that day, fear kept them from sharing the news of Jesus. What are you fearful of? What stops you from telling other people about Jesus? And what might God be calling you to do?

Let us pray:

God of Mercy, Help us to overcome the fear that lives in us and sometimes consumes us. Help us to not be afraid. You have been calling people throughout the ages to proclaim the good news of

your Risen Son, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Help us to tell everyone of your loving mercy and endless forgiveness. Amen.



Monday, August 3, 2015

Text: Mark 2:1-12

2When he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home. 2So many gathered around that there was no longer room for them, not even in front of the door; and he was speaking the word to them. 3Then some people came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. 4And when they could not bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him; and after having dug through it, they let down the mat on which the paralytic lay. 5When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, 'Son, your sins are forgiven.' 6Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, 7'Why does this fellow speak in this way? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?' 8At once Jesus perceived in his spirit that they were discussing these questions among themselves; and he said to them, 'Why do you raise such questions in your hearts? 9Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, "Your sins are forgiven", or to say, "Stand up and take your mat and walk"? 10But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins'—he said to the paralytic— 11'I say to you, stand up, take your mat and go to your home.' 12And he stood up, and immediately took the mat and went out before all of them; so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, 'We have never seen anything like this!'

This is a great story about taking on another person's burdens. The men who carried the paralyzed man to the rooftop must have really loved him and wanted to find healing for him. They believed in the healing power of Jesus. They knew if they could reach Jesus, the paralyzed man would have a chance of being a fully functional person again. The group of men took on the burdens of the paralyzed man and took him to Jesus in hopes of receiving new life.

How do we take on the burdens of another person when many times we feel that we have too many burdens of our own to carry? At the National Youth Gathering in Detroit, we were called to take on the burdens of the people of Detroit. How could teenagers take on the burdens of so many hurting people? How could pastors and adult leaders take on their burdens? One of the ways I saw youth and adults taking on the burdens of the people of Detroit was by going out into their neighborhoods working to bring beauty and hope to people that feel hopeless. I saw youth and adults standing alongside of their sisters and brothers in Detroit, listening to their stories and even praying with them. I saw youth and adults unload thousands of packages of diapers for children and adults. I saw high school youth taking on the burdens of the people of Detroit just as Jesus called us to do. Our hands, God's work! For many of us, taking on the burdens of another may be as simple as walking with them, not leaving them alone to carry the heavy burden alone.

Let us pray:

Almighty God, so many people in the world are hurting; empower us to know how to help and carry the burdens of one other. Give us faith and courage to be persistent in our work as we proclaim the healing power in Jesus' name. Amen.



Tuesday, August 4, 2015

Text: Mark 6:47-51

⁷When evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land. ⁴⁸When he saw that they were straining at the oars against an adverse wind, he came towards them early in the morning, walking on the sea. He intended to pass them by. ⁴⁹But when they saw him walking on the sea, they thought it was a ghost and cried out; ⁵⁰for they all saw him and were terrified. But immediately he spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." ⁵¹Then he got into the boat with them and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded,

In this story we hear about the disciples being in a boat alone, out on the sea laboring to make any headway in the strong wind. Then the disciples see something coming towards them and it terrifies them...they thought they were seeing a ghost. As Jesus came closer to them, he spoke words that calmed their fears and he even calmed the sea.

There are times in our lives when things don't always work out the way we expected them to. Sometimes we find ourselves paddling against a strong wind which holds us back making us feel helpless and even hopeless. We wonder where Jesus is in our time of need. We might even call out for Jesus in prayer... When we can't hear an answer to our plea, when we can't see the signs that Jesus is at work in our lives, we might wonder - where is Jesus? Like the lyric of an old camp song "Jesus My Lord ... Have you seen Jesus my Lord?... He's here in plain view". Sometimes it's hard to see that Jesus is with us and working out salvation in us... working to restore the world. Many times our perspective of Jesus keeps us from seeing him and his work as he transforms our lives. Sometimes we have difficulty understanding the ways of Jesus ... who Jesus loves and forgives. Jesus was always reaching out to the outcasts, the unwanted people of his time. Jesus is still reaching out to people of our time. In Detroit, Jesus was very present in worship, on the streets, with the youth as they did yard work and cleaned up neighborhoods, as youth fed hungry people and with the people who call Detroit their home. Thirty thousand youth and adults were called go to Detroit to be the hands and feet of Jesus. From my perspective, Jesus asks only that we would trust in him and have faith that God who is in control will carry us home.

Let us pray:

Loving God, give us perspective when we cannot see you and your work. Help us to understand your ways and your mighty power at work in the world. Sometimes we lose our way and our vision is cloudy, help us when we can't see you, trusting in your loving mercy. Amen.



Wednesday, August 5, 2015

Text: Mark 15:33-39

³³ When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. ³⁴ At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" ³⁵ When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "Listen, he is calling for Elijah." ³⁶ And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down." ³⁷ Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. ³⁸ And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. ³⁹ Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was God's Son!"

This story is an account of the last hours of Jesus' life as he dies on the cross. Most people who are standing around watching didn't seem too sure as to who Jesus really was except for the centurion soldier. By the death of Jesus on the cross, we all have been set free from the bondage of sin. Jesus saves us from the powers of sin by dying for us. This is a free gift called salvation... we cannot save ourselves, only Jesus saves. What a great gift to have been given to us. What should be our response?

Saying thank you is hardly enough... our response should be "gratitude" for what Christ has done for us. To have an attitude of service seems pleasing to God, to be willing to serve people wherever they are, whatever the situation. We began a new ministry at our church about a year ago. We call it "The Lord's Diner". Our congregation, along with five other congregations, serves a meal every Wednesday evening in our fellowship hall to people in need. The number one requirement is to have a servant's heart. No judging people, no making rude comments, everybody must come ready to serve with a heart filled with gratitude. Ready to thank God for what God has done for us through Jesus' death on the cross. What should be our response? Live generously and have a servant's heart. Be ready to serve your sisters and brothers in Christ. Thanks be to God!

Let us pray:

Generous God, you gave your only Son, Jesus as a sacrifice for our sins. Help us to know the freedom we have in you - we are no longer slaves to sin but free to serve you, and through you we have new life. Amen.



Thursday, August 6, 2015

Text: Mark 6:30-44

³⁰ The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. ³¹ He said to them, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." For many were

coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. ³² And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. ³³ Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. ³⁴ As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things. ³⁵ When it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now very late; ³⁶ send them away so that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy something for themselves to eat." ³⁷ But he answered them, "You give them something to eat." They said to him, "Are we to go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread, and give it to them to eat?" ³⁸ And he said to them, "How many loaves have you? Go and see." When they had found out, they said, "Five, and two fish." ³⁹ Then he ordered them to get all the people to sit down in groups on the green grass. ⁴⁰ So they sat down in groups of hundreds and of fifties. ⁴¹ Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before the people; and he divided the two fish among them all. ⁴² And all ate and were filled; ⁴³ and they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. ⁴⁴ Those who had eaten the loaves numbered five thousand men.

In this story we can begin to see that people are growing hungry for Jesus. They are hungry for his word and hungry for his power of healing. We learn that 5,000 people found themselves out in the countryside away from their homes and hungry for supper. We can see that Jesus had compassion for them. We learn that Jesus takes two fish and a few loaves of bread and feeds 5,000 people, impossible ... Right!

Impossible! I have attended at least 7 ELCA National Youth Gatherings in my life time. Someone recently asked me "Why do you keep going to those youth gatherings? Don't you get tired of them?" I responded with Yes and No. See, I serve a congregation with an average age of 60 years of age, not too many young people attending church these days. I like working with young people but the challenges are greater then I remembered 15 – 20 years ago. With many more sporting opportunities, kids getting summer jobs earlier and earlier, not to mention the technological age that has taken over their lives. Youth ministry seems more and more difficult these days. So my answer is yes, maybe I am getting tired. But, no I am not stopping! Not as long as God keeps sending youth to events like the one in Detroit. I worry each time I begin the registration process but lo and behold our congregation sends a nice number of youth to the Church's largest worship service. To sit in Ford Field and look at 30,000 young people, pastors and adult leaders - it is amazing! Impossible? God will find a way to gather his people together that they may hear God's spoken Word and receive the true bread from heaven, the body and blood of our Lord and Savior, Jesus. Nothing is impossible with God!

Let us pray:

Good and gracious God, help us to remember that nothing is impossible with you. You are a compassionate God. Continue to call us together and to build us up so that we may continue to serve you and give you praise. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.



Friday, August 7, 2015

Text: Mark 1:14-15

¹⁴ Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God ¹⁵ and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”

I once had a conversation with a woman who is now in her retirement years. She talked about raising children and how her children never liked going to the pastor’s home to play with his children. I just had to know why so I asked. Why didn’t your kids like playing with the pastor’s kids? She said, well the pastor brought church home! The pastor had religious stuff hanging on the walls and they always prayed before and after meals. We don’t bring church home she told me! Oh my, I thought to myself.... Jesus calls us to go out into the streets and through the countryside proclaiming the good news “the kingdom of God has come near”. As we leave Detroit or our places of worship, “church”, take what you have heard and seen home with you. Take church home! Praise the Lord!

Let us pray:

Lord Jesus, We come to you in need, to walk in the hope that only you can give. Our way is unclear, show us your ways, Lord. Help us to focus on you alone that we might tell everybody what an amazing God that you are. Help us to be living instruments of your love. Amen.



Saturday, August 8, 2015

Text: Psalm 46:9-10

⁹ He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow, and shatters the spear; he burns the shields with fire. ¹⁰ “Be still, and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth.”

Coming home... Coming home to the north woods can be quite relaxing especially after visiting a large city like Detroit being surrounded by an extra volume of noise. It’s time to come home and be still, be quiet, slow the physical and mental parts of our bodies and be still. Being still can be difficult for many of us, sitting in silence reflecting on God’s word, reflecting on a wonderful week with the Lord trying hard not to cultivate stillness with thoughts. Be still, slow down the busy minds, listen to God’s voice. The more we hear God’s voice the better we recognize God’s activity; the more we hear God’s voice, the smaller our issues seem, the larger God appears. The more we hear God’s voice the more we want to follow God’s ways, God’s holy purpose for us. “Be still, and know that I am God.”

Let us pray:

Most Holy God, be with us in our stillness, take over our minds that we may only hear your voice. Wrap your arms around us holding us for this moment that we may feel your Holy presence. Amen.



