

## **Second Sunday after Pentecost – June 14, 2020**

### **Introduction**

**We are now in the season of Pentecost.** This is the longest season of the church year. It begins on the Day of Pentecost when the promised Holy Spirit [Counselor, Advocate] of God fell upon the disciples and those gathered with them in the upper room. In liturgical churches like ours, we count time in this season as **'The XXXXXX<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost.'** The season of Pentecost continues through the summer and fall ending on Christ the King Sunday in late November.

**After seven weeks, the white paraments of Easter are changed to the red of Pentecost.** The red reminds us of the *'tongues as of fire'* mentioned in Acts as the Holy Spirit fell upon the disciples. The Church was born in the fire of the Holy Spirit. The Sunday following Pentecost is called *'Holy Trinity'*. Here the white paraments commemorate the purity and holiness of God. Following Trinity Sunday, the color changes to green and remains so for the rest of the liturgical year.

**Green is the color of growth and of life.** For this reason it graces our altars for nearly one-half of the liturgical year. It is also known as the *'Season of Growth'* as believers grow in faith and service to their Lord. The corporate dimension of the Pentecost season calls believers to spread the Gospel to those in the world who have not encountered Jesus. Believers are called to live lives in service of others. There is also an individual dimension. The Holy Spirit seeks to transform believers into *'little Christs'* (using Paul's words) as they take up our Lord's ministry. Without the Holy Spirit, this radical transformation is not possible. It is the prayer of the Church that believers continue to grow in lives of faith and service.

**There is a bit of irony in thinking about the Pentecost season as a time of growth when we are not meeting as a community for worship.** To be honest with you, I have reservations about gathering in our church buildings and I fear that it is premature even though some are now doing so. My concern is based on the fact that many of our parishioners are in an age demographic that is extremely vulnerable to the coronavirus. [Self-disclosure: I am also part of that demographic.] I am reticent about going into buildings and confined spaces at this time. I also want you to know that my family and I evaluate this weekly. As your intentional interim pastor, I will follow our Bishop's guidance as well as the direction of public health officials. I am also certain that there will be a time when this particular danger will subside.

**What can churches do now?** Bishop Aitken has asked that all congregations form SMART teams that will monitor the situation and provide guidance as we consider, and finally begin to return to community worship. I have gathered a set of working documents recommended by the ELCA and the NE MN Synod that will guide us in this process. I

have sent these documents via email to the members of Bethel and Immanuel's church councils. Please talk to them, I have also sent a copy of these documents to each church offices so that they are available to any member of our parish. And finally, since we are a parish, decisions like this will be coordinated by the church councils as I work with them in ensuring the everyone's safety.

***It is comforting to me that we have entered the 'Pentecost – the Season of Grown' at this time.***

- ***Under the guidance of God's Holy Spirit, this is a time for our individual growth as followers of Jesus.*** This is especially appropriate now as our cities, our states, and our nation as a whole struggle with the inherent racism that has been crafted into our society over the last four hundred years. For me, this has been a time of much prayer, reflection, and growth.
- ***Under the guidance of God's Holy Spirit, this is a time for the members of our two churches and their councils to work together as we plan for a resumption of our life together as a community of faith.*** How do we do this safely and still meet the spiritual needs of our members? I am pleased that we have begun to discuss how we might celebrate the sacrament of holy Communion with compromising proper health practices. I am comfortable coming up to either church and doing a brief communion service outside on the parking lot where servers would distribute the elements to those who choose to gather [socially distanced]. Such details would have to be worked out and coordinated by the leadership of our congregations.
- ***Under the guidance of God's Holy Spirit, this is a time for our church councils to continue their work on the individual parish profiles and our combined parish profile.*** I have been assured by Deacon Brenda Tibbets that there will be candidates available next spring as we enter the call process. It is time to continue preparing. I believe that growth occurs as we look to our future as we seek to discover how we will respond to the ministry opportunities that God has set before us.
- ***And finally, under the guidance of God's Holy Spirit, this is a time for us to look at how we do ministry among our people.*** After some serious thought, I believe that it is imperative for us to continue to send out sermon/meditations to those who are unable to worship with us. Many of our members have called to tell me that they appreciate receiving the sermon/mediations via email and snail mail. Posting them to Facebook has also been helpful.

***In Christ ✝,***

***Pastor Steve***

### **Gospel: Matthew 9.35-10.8**

Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”

Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness. These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon, also known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him.

These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: “Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, proclaim the good news, ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’ Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment.

#### ***‘A Task of Great Urgency’***

**Let us pray.** Holy God, mighty Father, it is your will that all who believe in your Son should have eternal life. But Lord, there are many who are lost because they have not heard your saving Gospel. Our prayer this day is that you send your Holy Spirit upon us; empower our witness to your saving grace; and let us trust that you will give us the words to say as well as the courage to speak. In your mercy, bless those who hear with the gift of faith. We ask all this in Jesus’ name, amen.

**Brothers and sisters, grace to you and peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.**

It is a rare occasion when we face a task of great urgency. For the most part, our lives are pretty relaxed; few things require our **immediate attention**. Take income tax, for example. One has several months to gather information before the filing date. Even though there is a deadline, tax returns do not require immediate attention. Or, consider those large projects at home: painting the exterior or renovating one of the rooms. It’s work that requires some degree of planning beginning with a deadline. For many families, the deadline is set by the date of a child’s confirmation or graduation. And once you know the date, preparations can be done step-by-step so that final deadline can be

met . . . Sometimes just barely. My point is that most tasks do not need to be addressed immediately. There is time to do it well.

The first time in my life when I was confronted with a situation requiring my immediate attention was on **April 11<sup>th</sup>, 1985**. The time was 1:00 am, and I was sound asleep. Or, at least, I was asleep until Vicki poked me in the ribs and said, **“It’s time — Let’s go to the hospital. Alexandria is 40 miles away.”** Six hours later, our first daughter Joanna was born. That was a task of great urgency for us. There was little time for preparation . . . However, much to my wife's chagrin, I did find time to take a shower before we left. *Needless to say, she was not thrilled; but a new father must always look his best.*

Not surprisingly, the image of child birth was familiar to the early Church. They understood waiting. They waited, not for the birth of a child, but for the birth of a new age. They waited expectantly for the coming of the Kingdom. And with their waiting, came a sense of urgency. There was much to do before the coming of the Kingdom. And in today's Gospel, Jesus left no doubt what the Church's task was to be.

St. Matthew tells us that it had been a busy time for Jesus in Galilee. He **“went to all their cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom, and healing every disease and infirmity.”** The reaction of the crowds was not surprising. Jesus was the answer to their prayers. They surged around him, hoping only to touch him. **Here was a man** who could help them . . . **Here was a man** who was the answer to prayer . . . **Here was a man** who commanded the power of God.

**“When Jesus saw the crowds,”** the Evangelist writes, **“he had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless . . .”** They were **“like sheep without a shepherd.”** Jesus said to his disciples, **“THE HARVEST IS PLENTIFUL, BUT THE LABORERS ARE FEW; PRAY THEREFORE THE LORD OF THE HARVEST TO SEND OUT LABORERS INTO HIS HARVEST.”**

Although the New Age was already present in Jesus, it had yet to be born in the lives of the Galileans. To accomplish this, midwives were needed in great numbers. And like any birth, it required **immediate** attention. Why the urgency? The answer is clear: **lives depended upon it.** Jesus knew human life for what it was. He knew these people. He knew that their lives were marred by sin. He knew that this sin could only earn the wrath of God. And he knew that they would die without help. Their need was so great that they clutched at anything that gave them hope. **“They were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”**

The Galileans are not alone. There are others who are **“like sheep without a shepherd.”** I believe that Jesus is talking about the lives of his disciples today. Harassed and helpless? --- These words aptly describe us. **We live in a world** where we are isolated by

the Covid-19 pandemic. **We live in a world** our old normal will probably never return. We live in a world where there is financial uncertainty because of Covid-19. **We live in a world** where there are justifiable social disturbances as we discover that we have not been as open to others as we thought we were especially in matters of race and gender identity. **We live in a world** where anger, hatred, greed, lust, and alienation are realities in our own lives. **And, like all human beings, we live in a world** where life and health is uncertain for us and our for loved ones. At best, we are uneasy about the future; at worst, we fear it. Like the Galileans, our lives are marred by sin . . . Like the Galileans, our sin can only earn the wrath of God. And like the Galileans, we are **“harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”**

Deep-down, we know that this tragic picture is correct. If it were not, the answer-giving gurus, the self-anointed prophets and television’s Bible-spouting *holier than thou’s* would have far less credibility than they do have today. People search them out because these charlatans give easy answers to complex questions . . . Answers that put minds at ease . . . Answers that deny there is even a problem. **We are like sheep without a shepherd.**

But the good news today is that it is at this point that God intervenes. He did not leave the Galileans to their fate; nor does he leave us to our fate. He chose to involve himself in the person of Jesus Christ. Through his death and resurrection, the New Age was born. The awful power of sin was defeated, once and for all. Where there was once helplessness, there is now help. Where there was once hopelessness, there is now hope. And where there was once death, there is now life. Such was the gift of God to the twelve apostles who followed him. And such is the gift of God, through faith, to those who are baptized into the death and resurrection of his Son.

You see, baptism bespeaks a transformation. Every time we baptize child, that child’s life transformed. Not only is that child named as one who belongs to God, he/she is given a mission. It’s the same thing that happened to us when we were baptized. When we were baptized, we were called and empowered so that we might be useful to God for the work of the Kingdom

Jesus is even more specific with the apostles. They were not allowed to rest in their spiritual security. Just **‘knowing Jesus’** was not enough. Instead, he commissioned them to go out among the harassed and helpless of Galilee. They were to preach the coming of the Kingdom in all its power. Like Jesus, they were to heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, and cast out the demons. They were to act as midwives for the Kingdom.

And so it is with us. We have been baptized into Jesus. We have heard the story of salvation and it is our life-line in this broken world. But baptism changes us from hearers into doers. After baptism, we are people set aside by God to do his will. Just **'knowing Jesus'** is simply not enough. We are not allowed to rest in our spiritual security. It is imperative that we also take up the ministry of the Kingdom. The harassed and helpless are all around us. The task is urgent because it is a matter of life and death. **Like Jesus**, we are to announce the coming of the Kingdom. **Like him**, we are to heal the wounds in the lives of others. **And like him**, we are to use the power given us by the Holy Spirit in baptism.

The task is urgent as look to the future of our congregations. **There is a need** for us to speak words of comfort to our neighbors. We can do so because God has first comforted us. **There is a need** for us to love the unlovable. We can do so because God has first loved us. **And most important, there is a need** for us to forgive the unforgivable. And we can do so because God has first forgiven us. Jesus said, **"THE HARVEST IS PLENTIFUL, BUT THE LABORERS ARE FEW; PRAY THE LORD OF THE HARVEST TO SEND OUT LABORERS INTO HIS HARVEST."** But then on June 14<sup>th</sup>, Jesus gives his disciples at Bethel and Immanuel Lutheran Parish all authority and sends them out, charging them, **"PREACH AS YOU GO, SAYING, THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS AT HAND"** Today, the helpless and the harassed are waiting for us. Amen.