

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost - Year A

16th Sunday of Quarantine

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Jeremiah 28:5-9

Psalm 89:1-4, 15-18

Romans 6:12-23

Matthew 10:40-42

06/28/2020

Gospel

The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew:

[Jesus said to the twelve:]⁴⁰“Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. ⁴¹Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous; ⁴²and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.”

The Gospel of our Lord.

Prayer

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

Welcome

Good morning! Today’s Gospel lesson is rather short, but I think the size allows us to incorporate the second lesson from Romans more effectively. In the Gospel we are

challenged in two ways, to both proclaim the Gospel, and to receive it, vis-a-vis the person delivering the message. Both are equally challenging.

The first challenge is proclaiming the Gospel. This can be especially hard for the modern church. For so long the perceived culture in the West was “Christian.” So it was often thought that you didn’t need to proclaim the Gospel. This was the job of the professional, the pastor that the church hired to do that sort of thing. We are still reaping the rewards of this disastrous thinking. As I have said before, my job is to work myself out of a job, by giving the congregation the tools to go out and spread the Good News.

The other side of the coin is in receiving the Gospel message. I’ll be the first to admit that I HATE asking for help, or receiving it. Several years ago before I had graduated from college, I remember experiencing just this predicament. It was at Camp Luther in West Virginia and we were at the end of the week and we were beginning to tear down and pack up on the second to last day. If you have ever spent a week at a camp with high school students, you can imagine how tired we all were! I needed to tear down a tent. Now, this wasn’t your average pop-up tent like we use at the yard sale. This wasn’t even a camping tent, which I think we all know can provide their own challenges. This was a 15x15 ft funeral tent that I had borrowed from the family business. They consisted of twenty 3 inch aluminum pieces and a piece of canvas large enough to cover a one car garage. They were held down by two to three 3 foot metal stakes and rope. Over the years Crummitt and Son employees have perfected the task of putting up and taking down the tent. They’re great tents... but they’re certainly heavy too.

Now, instead of asking for help, I just struggled. The wet canvas weighed what felt like 10 tons, and the rain had made everything slippery. But I didn’t ask for help, I

just got angry that nobody stepped in. Let's not forget that everyone was equally busy with their own tasks. But when some people were finally able to come over, I didn't know how to ask them. I was silent. Fortunately, they stepped in anyway, but the whole time I felt like I had done something wrong for needing the help. What about that good ol' American saying "Pull yourself up by your own bootstraps?" I was unable to accept the help, thinking that I needed to do it all on my own.

Thankfully, God is used to dealing with idiots like me. This is where our reading from Romans comes in, let's take another listen: *"12Do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. 13No longer present your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and present your members to God as instruments of righteousness. 14For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace. 15What then? Should we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! 16Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? 17But thanks be to God that you, having once been slaves of sin, have become obedient from the heart to the form of teaching to which you were entrusted, 18and that you, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. 19I am speaking in human terms because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to greater and greater iniquity, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness for sanctification. 20When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. 21So what advantage did you then get from the things of which you now are ashamed? The end of those things is death. 22But now that you*

have been freed from sin and enslaved to God, the advantage you get is sanctification. The end is eternal life. 23For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

St. Paul (whose feast day and commemoration are tomorrow, by the way) is explaining to the church in Rome that we have already been helped. We are “*those who have been brought from death to life...*” and now the grace of God rules in our hearts. The challenge for all of us, myself included, is actually believing in it! And from that belief flows the proclamation of the Gospel to the world all around us! In her commentary on this text Elisabeth Johnson writes that: “*Sent by God, Jesus sends his disciples to participate in his mission of proclaiming in word and deed the good news of God's kingdom drawing near. Matthew assumes that the church is a "sent" church, a missionary church (Matthew 28:18-20). There is simply no other way to be the church! This understanding is being recovered in our own day with the missional church movement. There is growing awareness that mission is not just a program of the church; it is (or ought to be) the defining purpose of everything the church does... What would happen if we stopped expecting people to come on their own initiative through our church doors, and instead took seriously our calling to bring the gospel to them? What would happen if we truly believed that we bear the presence of Christ to every person we encounter, in every home, workplace, or neighborhood we enter? What would happen if we saw every conversation as an opportunity to speak words of grace, every interaction as an opportunity to embody Christ's love for the neighbor?*”

What WOULD that look like? Well, there is only one way to find out. Amen.