Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost - Year A

23rd Sunday of Quarantine (24th overall)

St. Paul’s Lutheran Church

Isaiah 51:1-6

Psalm 138

Romans 12:1-8

Matthew 16:13-20

08/23/2020

**Gospel**

The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew:

13Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” 14And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” 15He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” 16Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” 17And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. 18And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. 19I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” 20Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

 The Gospel of our Lord.

**Prayer**

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

**Gifts for New Life**

Good morning! In your first semester at Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary one of the classes that you took was Pastoral Care. The class was taught by the amazing Dr. Tony Everett. The class met once a week for lecture sessions and once a week in assigned small groups to go over case studies and review material. One of the things that Dr. Everett did with every class was administer his own version of a personality test. It was a simplified and fun version of an Enneagram or Myers-Briggs test where instead of number or letter groups, you were identified by an animal. I’ve done the test with the Mutual Ministry team and with the Congregational Council a few times. The personality types are giraffes, hawks, beavers, and monkeys! They all fit different traits, the hawks were clinical and observant, they soar above but eventually fly down to make a move. The giraffe was analytical too, but stuck in their head a little too much. My second highest trait was the beaver. The beaver is the person who gets things done, while everyone else was discussing the problem the beaver would already be at work. The last group was the monkey, which was the trait I had the most of, and the monkey’s only concern was making sure that everyone’s feelings didn’t get hurt.

Now, a professionally administered Myers-Briggs was part of the psychiatric evaluation that every seminary student took, but we didn’t talk about our four letters; instead we used the secret Southern Seminary language of hawks, monkeys, giraffes, and beavers. When a friend drifted off in a discussion we would tell the hawk to come back. When I was concerned with how someone felt, whether it was needed or not, I would apologize saying, "I’m such a monkey, sorry!” The great thing about this little personality test was that it helped to illustrate that even in seminary, surrounded by future pastors, everyone was different. Most importantly it helped to reinforce that there wasn’t ONE way for a person to behave or help.

It’s a point that St. Paul drives home in our second reading from Romans. We all have a variety of different gifts, but the Church needs ALL of them. St. Paul has spent all of Romans, his letter to the Christian community in Rome, building up an argument that our lives have been completely changed because of God’s action in the person of Jesus. And it’s the confession and acclamation of Peter in today’s Gospel reading that tells us who this Jesus guy is! *“You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”* While we, the reader, already know this, it’s the first time that Jesus is affirmed as such by one of the disciples. The game has been changed. The world is being turned upside down. Jesus the Messiah, Jesus the Son of God, Jesus the Son of Man, his life, death and resurrection change how we live our lives. It’s reflected in Romans when you look at the whole letter. Because of X (chapters 1-11), therefore Y (chapters 12-).

While I always respect Romans, it can be easy to take the letter out of the very real historical setting in which it took place. Israel Kamudzandu, professor of New Testament Studies at St. Paul School of Theology, writes that: *“The Apostle Paul’s letter to the Romans is both a countercultural and counter-political document. It points to the global renaissance of a human family whose identity, frame of perception, and discipleship are based on God’s act of reconciling with humanity, regardless of our vulnerability (Romans 1:18-5:11).”* Stop and think about what St. Paul is doing. He is writing a letter to what was essentially the center of the known world saying that the influence of Rome shouldn’t be acknowledged but ignored. That NOBODY was any more important than the next person, and that our uniqueness is a reflection of God’s work in our lives. It would be like writing a letter to an underground and quasi legal religious group in Washington, D.C. and challenging the entire system of government.

The world can often cast off some members, but Paul reminds us that Christ died for ALL, and that everyone is a valued part of the body of Christ. In fact, it’s these differences that make us so strong! We need everyone to make sure the metaphorical body of Christ works smoothly. On Monday I used the analogy that we don’t need a congregation full of preachers, it would be a disaster. We need everyone, the ones like Dale and Sonja, who perform the music, the ones in the background like Sue who make sure we know how worship will work. We need the Megans of the church to make sure the Zoom worship is running smoothly, and we need each and every one of you because of gifts that are so numerous, I can’t even name them! So, listen to these words again:

*“1I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. 2Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect. 3For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. 4For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, 5so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. 6We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; 7ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; 8the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.”* God has blessed you with something that makes you uniquely you! Now don’t ever forget that. Amen.