

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Feast Day of St. Peter and Paul Observed - Year B

69th Week of Pandemic - Indoor Service

Acts 12:1-11

Psalm 87:1-3,5-7

II Timothy 4:6-8,17-18

John 21:15-19

06/27/2021

Gospel

The Holy Gospel according to St. John:

15When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my lambs.” 16A second time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Tend my sheep.” 17He said to him the third time, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” And he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep. 18Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go.” 19(He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, “Follow me.”

The Gospel of our Lord.

Prayer

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

Amen.

Next...

Good morning! In the eighth grade, after school had just finished, I was walking down a flight of steps when the kid behind me made a comment that finally caused me to snap, and a fist fight ensued. Dale and I had never gotten along, but over the past couple months his bullying had increased and it had finally gotten to be too much. We both ended up suspended for a few days. Do you want to know what the bullying had been? He had been calling me gay, or some other derogatory slang term for anyone who considered themselves homosexual. So I had gotten into a fight simply because someone dared to categorize me as a member of the LGBTQIA+ community.

Here's another story. Growing up at my church in Wheeling, WV we had always known a family that I shall call the Smith family. The great grandmother had known my mom when she was a child, and her grandchildren had their own kids that were roughly my own age. We didn't see all of the Smith family, some of the grandchildren were grown adults who didn't come around. One such person was John Smith. At the time I could not have been more than 10 years old, maybe younger. But the first time I heard about John it was with hushed whispers. Something was clearly different about John, but my young mind couldn't exactly figure it out. In fact, it was as if he was sick, or as if something was wrong with John. Before I had ever met the guy, I already had a distinct impression of who he was. You know what I eventually found out? John was gay. That was all. The minute the guy walked into the church the entire room changed. It's no surprise that John rarely came to worship, can you really blame the guy?

As I have often said, if you ask the average person off the street what most Christian churches stand for, they'll probably tell you that we're anti-homosexual. Over 2,000 years of ministry and this is what we've been boiled down to. What's worse, in a lot of congregations, the label is accurate. Fortunately, the Church hasn't always been defined by what we exclude, but instead, about who (whom?) we sought out to fill our community.

Today we celebrate the Feast day of St. Peter and St. Paul. Two titans of the early church. Specifically for us, St. Paul is especially important, because it's from him that we got our congregational name! Were it not for God's wonderful work through these two men, the good news might never have spread. Good old Martin Luther even said that after Jesus Christ, St. Paul was the wisest of all men.¹ The two apostles had different but equally important jobs. In the beginning this wasn't always clear, but after a meeting in Jerusalem, it was decided that these two men would each lead ministry efforts to two groups. St. Peter had the task of spreading the Good News to the Jews. And while I have always liked St. Peter the most -- his numerous mistakes and penchant for speaking first and thinking second give me hopes that I too can someday serve God faithfully -- it's clear that St. Paul had by far the more difficult job. Because it was decided that St. Paul would be in charge of the ministry to the Gentiles. Which means anyone who wasn't a Jew... so pretty much the rest of the known world.

We take this for granted, but I don't think we realize how radical a decision this was. Jesus was born in Israel, he was a good Jewish guy, his faith was very much a Jewish one, and yet the early church had made the

¹ Luther, Martin, and Ewald M. Plass. *What Luther Says: A Practical In-Home Anthology for the Active Christian*. Saint Louis: Concordia Pub. House, 2006. p. 1026.

crazy choice that the Good News of Jesus Christ needed to be heard by those outside of the twelve tribes. As I say every Holy Trinity Sunday, this is just too good! We've got to let others know! And that's exactly what St. Paul did. He traveled from city to city, setting up shop and quite literally getting the word out.

And that message was the good news that Jesus Christ had died, risen from the grave, and ascended to heaven. This meant that God was ushering in a new world. What drew people in was the hope of this message, and the stories about the life of Jesus. It was stories of a man going against the grain, of hanging out with the lowest of the low, the ones that society had either forgotten or intentionally left out. It was a message to those on the fringe of society that the church was a place where they were more than just safe! They were loved and cherished.

I'll be honest, I've had it pretty darn good. I'm a white straight man who was born in the west and who comes from a strong middle class household. Things literally couldn't be more in my favor. Which is why it can sometimes be hard for me to understand the challenges of those on the fringe. I think what I find the most surprising is that the times I have felt lonely or pushed to the side are already more than enough to make me struggle and doubt. I cannot begin to think what it must be like for a member of the LGBTQIA+ community. The soul searching and longing for genuine friendship and trust must be agonizing.

Fortunately, God hears the cry of God's people, and sends others out to welcome those in pain. That's where congregations like St. Paul's can help. In my time here I have noticed that St. Paul's is a very loving place. If you set foot in these doors, you will be welcomed with a genuine smile. But I think we can do better. That's why I'm asking that St. Paul's begin the

process of becoming a Reconciling In Christ congregation. This would mean that we intentionally set out to become a place where members of the LGBTQIA+ community will know that they are loved, welcomed, and most importantly, celebrated.

Reconciling Works is a group that began all the way back in 1974 and has “advocated for the full welcome, inclusion, and equity of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex and asexual/aromantic (LGBTQIA+) Lutherans in all aspects of the life of their Church, congregations, and community.”² In total, there are 950 RIC congregations and another 364 on the journey towards becoming one! But here’s the interesting thing. Within the Virginia Synod there are only three. Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Lexington, St. Mark Lutheran Church in Charlottesville, and Apostles Lutheran Church in Gloucester. This means that if someone here on the Peninsulas wants to worship in a Lutheran church that they KNOW is affirming, they have a way to travel. This means that an estimated 5.6% of the population doesn’t have a welcoming Lutheran congregation nearby. Most importantly, this means that WE, as the Body of Christ, are missing whole parts that could make us whole!

As the ministry of St. Peter and Paul has shown us, sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ means loving and valuing each and every person, especially the ones that others have overlooked, forgotten, or in a lot of cases, intentionally left out. So... Do you think you’re ready for it? I think you are. Over the next weeks and months let’s explore together the next place that St. Paul’s has been called to serve. Amen.

² <https://www.reconcilingworks.org/about/>