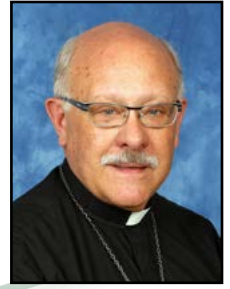




Hear the Word

from Pastor James N. McEachran



Gather... Encourage... Equip... Send...

Second Sunday of Easter

April 8, 2018

The Church is the Workshop of the Holy Spirit

John 20:19-31

Grace to you as we live in the afterglow of Easter and in the presence of our Risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The headline drew me in---“This Has to Be Remembered for the Rest of Our Lives.” An account of the Yearbook Staff at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida.

Here was the issue: how to memorialize the mass shooting on Valentine’s Day 2018. The staff determined to keep what had been their chosen theme, “As One,” but knew that the memorial section had to reflect the outcome which would carry 2500 copies of the book for generations to come.

They determined that it would be a follow up phrase to their main theme (“As One.”) It had to be just right, but not deny the horror and grief of the day that 17 of their friends had died. They played the words, recalled the day, until Taylor, the Design Editor, said “I’ve got it. ‘Forever loved.’” “FOREVER LOVED.”

How must it have been for the disciples and friends of Jesus after the horror and events of Holy Week? What must have been their ability to live out of times of betrayal and desertion knowing the events of those days after Palm Sunday? And even after the news of His Resurrection?

John gives a pretty clear clue: In an upper room “and the door locked for fear of the Jews.” Unsure. Not sure. But, this much, they were together with the exception of one, Thomas. (I have always felt that Thomas represents most of us!)

What must their thoughts have been? Bet they thought they were FINISHED! How were they sharing their time and wondering if Jesus, if they, would be remembered? How could joy return after suffering, death, grief, fear of tomorrow? That is, until He stood in the midst of them!

Imagine! Jesus. Right in the middle of them >they were Christ-centered! “Shalom (a) lechem, Peace be yours!” The Risen Lord’s initial gift was to bind them as one AGAIN! The Crucified One was alive! REAL, PALPABLE, PHYSICAL, HANDS/SIDE. And the disciples were echaesan, ecstatic, overfilled with JOY.

Recalled—re-sent—to be in mission, with peace again and whoosh, the Holy Spirit. Remembered, I believe, His words from before that those who receive YOU, receive the FATHER---God! {There were two givings of the Holy Spirit, one here and the one at Pentecost, 50 days later, recorded in Acts.}

But, wait, a week later, a Sunday out “on the first day of the week,” Thomas is back, our “Thinking Theologian” and no “Doubter,” in my book! Here is the point: Thomas shows up!

Same drill, doors shut. “Peace Drill” one more time as if Jesus cares for the crowd, but for each one of us too!

The personal approach links heaven to earth again; “Thomas, put your finger here, my hands, put your hand out and touch my side.” Out of seeing, and touch, be believing! A personal invite...be-living in trust!

“MY LORD AND MY GOD!”

How is it with you, with us on this week after our flowered Cross worship and confession that “Christ is Risen!” Yup, Risen Indeed!

The Church, Saint Andrew’s Lutheran congregation, here in this place, we are the workshop of the Holy Spirit.

Linked in common confession (The Creed of our Baptism is minutes away!) and the Lord Jesus is right smack-dab in the middle of us. In the Word, at the Font, with Jesus as host at the Table! That we might re-member!

It is the power of the Holy Spirit to fill us up; guide us forward so that we can follow Him into the world for which He lived and died...One in Christ to serve as we remember our first meeting with Christ again as we woke up on this Lord’s Day.

I am Thomas in this story. Perhaps, you are too. My life is filled with many dimensions of faith---sometimes a bit of doubt, a dab of fear, a touch of cynicism, and a sneaker wave of faith-lessness in the face of mass shootings and all that the media and culture throw at you and at me.

But, Jesus comes back to me. And I am called to remember grace beyond it all, even my sufferings! Here He is right in the middle of my life, my little marbled world where I feel so insignificant, but Here He is “My Body for you”...touch and see; my Spirit given anew...breathe and live and go; His word, “Peace”...share and go with your brothers and sisters, believe trust and serve, trust and obey for there is NO other way. And, I go, we go! Be-living!

In Jesus, we are called to SHOW UP! Want to hear, see what that looks like? Try the First Lesson: one heart, one soul, life in common, witnessing, no one needy, treasures of life given over to the Lord to serve others until He comes again.

Sounds a little like us most days! Haven’t quite gotten to the “sell everything” marker, but we give deeply of “time, talent, treasure and voice.” Faith-full/filled in stewardship, managing the generous gifts God gives to us each day!

The 37 members of the yearbook staff are sorting pictures, adding words, bringing hope in the midst of days of grief and suffering; in a world so often warped and broken---our world.

Those who live in the Spirit of the Crucified and Risen One have learned to live in the midst of darkness and fear knowing that the light of love of God in Christ will ever prevail! That is our hope and the promise “for we declare/witness to all what we have seen and heard so that ALL may have fellowship (koinonia) with us; “AND IN TRUTH OUR FELLOWSHIP IS WITH THE FATHER AND WITH HIS SON JESUS CHRIST...SO THAT OUR JOY MAY BE OVERFLOWING AND COMPLETE.”

Recall the themes of that 452 page yearbook in Parkland? “As One.” “Forever Loved.”

How will our book of life be titled? Illustrated? Remembered? How about:

“We Walk in the Light and Love of Christ.”

But, for today, we gather to be reworked and rewoven by the Holy Spirit at worship. That we might truly walk in the newness of life until we meet again!

And our prayer? The Risen Christ walks on wounded feet, stands with wounded side, breaks with wounded hand...with the Spirit of Gentleness...

*"May we, Christ's body, walk and serve and stand with those oppressed in this and in ev'ry land,
till all are blessed and can a blessing be, restored in Christ to true humanity."*

But, wait, for now, Jesus stands at the door and knocks---KNOCK, KNOCK...Jesus comes to US! May we, each one called, open the door, pick up, show up to walk in His ways. COME, HOLY SPIRIT, COME! Amen.