

FIRST LESSON: Acts 16:16-34

SECOND LESSON: Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17, 20-21

THE GOSPEL: John 17:20-26

The Seventh Sunday of Easter

June 2, 2019

“Resurrection Glory”

Sermon Preached by Pastor Lowell Nelson

American Lutheran Church of Sun City

Grace and peace be to you through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Resurrection glory is the final piece of the puzzle for this post-Easter time, this time when we have celebrated Easter and we continue for these seven weeks to understand the depth and breadth of God’s love. Sometimes you can insult a theologian by calling them a theologian of glory. Glory, in that regard, is only the good things about life, the wonderful and expansive view of God’s love, which is certainly a part of what we understand, but the resurrection glory includes the tremendous gift of Christ’s life and death and yes, the resurrection so that it bounds the deepest of our life, the deepest components of hurt and pain, that universal fear of death all the way to this basic position, all the way to the ascension. It is a resurrection; resurrection glory combines it all in this tremendous breadth and depth of life, so it’s meant to be encouragement to you and to me, to understand the theology of the cross. This theology that understands that our own God suffered for us and died for us and through the power of the Holy Spirit was raised for us to destroy the power of death and to bring heaven into our own midst and then to move forward for our Pentecost season. It’s just a glorious transition to this time.

I guess I’ll call it going deep. I sometimes misread the power of Joel Osteen. Perhaps you’ve listened to him. I remember when he first started I saw him, and he seemed just very nice and nervous. Now he fills up 20,000 or so in his church, and he’s still nice, but he’s not so nervous, that’s for sure. And it’s this understanding, that for myself what he captures, I just want us to amplify we’ve got the whole story, which is in the challenges of life, and as I’ve come to know you and you’ve known me, you think about the challenges: health and economics, politics, the church itself, all the things that are things that can divide and fracture us are actually unified in the great depth, the resurrection glory of Jesus Christ. That’s going deep.

In our faith as Lutherans, as I best understand the history of the church, go where people are hurting. This is the first story, the epistle here from Acts, this discovery that Paul and Silas are in the midst of terribly difficult circumstances. They have destroyed the moneymaker known as this young fortuneteller. In this culture there, she was possessed by a snake god, and her comments, even though they were true, that these are slaves, speaking of Paul and Silas, these are servants of the most high God who proclaimed to you a way of salvation frustrated Paul so much that he, in the name of Christ, ordered out the spirit and through the power of Christ, the spirit was gone, but that destroyed the whole money making option. She no longer had that gift so to speak, so they were put away, because they were disrupting things. As they were being disruptive, they were beaten, which was totally against the law, but they did not understand that Paul was a member of Roman society and so, here they are in midst of jail. I don’t know in your difficult

circumstances, if this is the way you'd respond. I don't think this is certainly the way I always respond, but this is the way they responded, Paul and Silas, because they understood the depth of God's love, even in the midst of despair where they were praying and singing hymns to God. Now that's a faith that is evangelical, because as they were singing, it says here, the prisoners were listening to them. Then, this earthquake that opens up freedom for them, if they were just theology of glory people, they'd say, God's opened a way, let's get out of here. But I think you know how that works, that if you leave and you escape, the jailer has to die, because he's failed at his job. That's why he was preparing to kill himself, because he thought everybody had left, and here they are, still there. They cared enough not to destroy his life by their potential freedom, and he was transformed. He called for the lights, rushing in, fell down trembling, and asked, "What must I do to be saved?" And they said, "Trust God. Believe in God, and you will be saved, you and your household."

This beautiful, beautiful story of redemption, if you take it seriously, he was no more free than they were. He was imprisoned in his own job. He was imprisoned with the people who were being jailed. So he actually took them out of there, took them to his house in this celebration and joy. If they had not stayed in the midst of darkness and despair, they would have missed this opportunity for an entire household to be baptized and become believers. I think that's part of our call as the church to be with those who are suffering. Yes, us; yes, we as humans - no longer expected to be perfect to get God to love us, but because God's perfected love, to be treated with respect and desire, all of us equal at the foot of the cross. But also, just the way we reach out to those who are hurting.

Really proud of the work of the Benevolence Committee, so thankful for their involvement. We had a dear person, Kate, who is the Director of the Indian Mission in Rock Point, northeast Arizona, and she came down and shared some of their concerns, and I'm so thankful that a ministry of the church is there. The thing that broke my heart is that as the water table is dropping, their wells are not deep enough, and so what's left is water that is horribly full of arsenic and other things, which, of course create learning disabilities for the kids, and it's just you could say hopeless, right? Until you hang with people who have an understanding that God is there in the midst of this and is calling us forward to be of help and concern. I don't know if that amazes you that in the United States, we will be doing mission projects just like we do in Africa and other places, but we need, I pray, that we respond to these opportunities to serve, because we're not, this resurrection glory allows us to see clearly and to see in the pain and suffering of the earth.

The second reading speaks about the absolute glory of God, this understanding of the spirit and the church and everyone in heaven. This beautiful phrase of how the church works, everyone who hears says come, and everyone who is thirsty come, and let anyone who wishes take water as the gift of life, a beautiful understanding of baptism. So I just wanted to point out to you the beautiful, the stunning cross that we have with this glass that hearkens to a beautiful message. As we prepare for the 50th anniversary, I'm starting to pay more attention to the beautiful things of this church and it still overwhelms me to be able to be here, but as I look forward there, you see Jesus Christ with the hands like this, one up, one reaching down to a person there in need with the hands looking more like this, that tension that exists in humanity that we're waiting for the Lord's favor, and I can see this both ways, that this is Christ descending down to be with us. This is, of

course, Christ ascending to heaven. We need both. We need this power to understand that God was with us all the way into our human frailty and the amazing power all the way up into heaven. This beautiful understanding of resurrection glory gives me hope and confidence for our church and for you and for me that we will be able to be one because of our need for Lord and Savior.

There are ways to unify the church, but one way to do it is to unify upon this absolute trust that Jesus Christ is the unity in which seek. He is the alpha and the omega, meaning the beginning and the end, the Greek alphabet, the first and the last. This unity is what God can bring through Jesus Christ. So, as we enter into our Pentecost season, next week, I invite you to wear your red, your Wisconsin red, or your Ohio State red, or Alabama red, or I have a different shirt red, but whatever it may be for you, we're getting into the season now of, with this is our understanding that Christ all the way to the depths of despair, all the way to the lifelong hope, all of it covered through God's love. Then we're able to move with the spirit into a wonderful, productive ministry together and for the sake of this world.

This unity, this absolute desire for God's unity in a world so fractured, is my cross and your cross, used in our baptismal understanding. I've said that before to people. I was trying to explain it to confirmation, when it says, "Take your cross." Sometimes that really does mean despair. That sometimes does mean the pain that we have in life, but I try to explain it this way. Take your baptismal cross, your identity, this understanding that you are a child of God, and that we are unified in this love of Jesus Christ, is our hope.

And then, I have one last encouragement for you for our communion today. When you hear the word, remember, and it certainly hearkens back. It's a root word that reminds us to do not forget. It has a parallel to amnesia. Do not forget who you are, but remember also means to be unified in this amazing body of Christ through the grace and love of Jesus Christ. As you hear these words, remember, you and I are unified. We are brought together. We are remembered into the body of Christ. That's simply a memory, but actually part of, and it is beautiful. I pray for God's blessings upon our experiment with weekly communion that it is a deep, unifying aspect of our worship life together.

So, at the end of this Easter season, I thank you for being part of this movement of God known as American Lutheran Church and for this understanding that God's resurrection glory covers the whole gamut of life, it covers all of eternity, it covers the precious nature of hurt and the precious nature of healing. Our Lord and Savior unifies us, and I give thanks that's our understanding of resurrection glory. Amen.