

First Lesson: Exodus 12: 1-4, 11-14
Second Lesson: I Corinthians 11:23-26
Gospel: John 13:1-17, 31b-35

Maundy Thursday
April 18, 2019

“Communion”

Sermon Preached by Pastor Gary Garvey American Lutheran Church of Sun City

Oh, my gosh. They say the winter goes by too quickly. And this snowbird is about ready to roll away, and I am so thankful for each and every one of you who have given so much and have given me the opportunity, Diane and I, to come amongst you and be a part of this wonderful community called American Lutheran Church in Sun City, Arizona. Such a great people. And I've had many opportunities here to go out and share the fabric of your life, for many of you, to hear about you and to hear some of you when things are going great and when things are not going so great. While just the other day, I got a phone call from a woman, and she said, "Pastor, would you come and bring communion and would you come and be with me in the hospital at 6:20 in the morning." And I said, "I may need to send Pastor Lowell on this one." And I said, "I can do that, and it would be my distinct honor to go and do that for you." And we went over there, and we had prayer, and we had communion, and she went in and she had a total knee replacement. And then I talked to her today, and she's back home with her son, and I think about that and I think about this text. This whole story of communion, God traveling across the universe with 12 disciples, and it all comes to a place where he's going to be delivered into the hands of men who are going to kill and scourge and attempt to take his life away from him. Tomorrow, we will have black Friday. And then very soon, we're going to have Easter. But, in this event, Christ is trying to share an intimacy. He's trying to share what this communion has meant to him in this travel across the land. And there's 1 of the 12 who's all about betraying him and selling him out and kicking him to the curb for 30 pieces of silver. In this intimacy, there's communion, and in this intimacy, there's the washing of the feet and embracing and loving on these men who have left their professions and felt the call and embraced that call and moved on out and followed him to go out and share the message of the Gospel, here and beyond the resurrection. To share that message of life.

Some of you know, some of you may not know, my son and his wife and my 3-year old granddaughter are missionaries in Papua, New Guinea, and I get these feedback clips of being a missionary in a village, and I see my little granddaughter running around with these little native kids and playing around, and I see my daughter-in-law making wicker baskets and cooking on an open fire, and I see these crazy things, and I think to myself, "Oh, my God, what love is this?" What love is this that Christ embraced and loved these people and loves all of you, as we all do as well?

We go to the hospital quite a bit. I went down, and I prayed with Harold Peterson. He was going in for hip replacement, and what a gift and what a man. We were talking about blood counts and all of those things; his are better than mine. That's a man, I'm telling you, when I grow up, I want to be just like him. He's something else. He's just a - what a guy. The people of God in Christ Jesus at American Lutheran Church, it just doesn't get any better than you. It's like, you know, you guys are just hard to leave; you're too much fun. And when I think about that, (I've got to go; I've got to do some self-care for myself.), but we look forward to our time together, and I know it's always a blessing to us, and we hope it is to you, too. But that kind of intimacy, going out and sharing with one and feeling that

communion and knowing that these are the people of God in Christ Jesus and how important it is to commune the saints. It's so linked to Paul's teaching, who went on in Romans 12, 4 through 13 and First Corinthians 12, teaching that in Christ, Christians form a single body, a single body, and we become the body of Christ in Christ Jesus.

In the New Testament Greek, the word is "haggias"; translating it into English, it means "saint." Saints are referred to as Christians who are holy because they are consecrated to God in Christ. The word saint is used in the New Testament 50 times. The Heidelberg Catechism, citing Romans 8:32 and First Corinthians 6 and First John 1, claims that all members of Christ have communion, have communion with Him and are recipients of all his gifts. And the Catechism states all the faithful form 1 body. The good of each is communicated to others, communicated to others. We must therefore believe there exists a communion of goods in the church, a communion of goods, but the most important member is Christ since he is the head, the head. Therefore, the riches of Christ are communicated to all the members through the sacraments, especially through the sacrament of communion. As His church is governed by 1 in the same spirit, all the goods that we have received become a part of 1 common fund. The persons who are linked to this communion include both those in heaven and on earth. Oh, my goodness. We have lost so many church treasures since the first of the year, people who have gone on to their great reward, and we share with them in holy communion. In the same chapter in Hebrews 12, the Christians on earth have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem and to an innumerable angels and festal gathering and to the assembly of the first born who are enrolled in heaven and to a judge who is God of all and the spirits of just men made perfect.

Martin Luther defined the phrase "the communion of saints". When you hear the word "church," my goodness, *communio sanctorum*, which in German means a congregation of saints, that is a congregation made up only of saints. I don't know how they explain Judas. Christian church and congregation of saints are one and the same thing. Lutheranism affirms that the church shares a common goal, to do prayer and communion for one another. The book of Concord, the official compendium of the Lutheran church, teaches that we know the ancients speak of the prayers of the dead. We remember the faithfully departed prayers of the people every Sunday, including those who have gone before us. And we share with them in our sacred rites, and in funeral rites we hear it. In our worship we hear it, and we connect, and we become a part of.

My dear friend back here, Gary Ulrich, has put together a program called Stephen Ministry, and it's such a beautiful thing to join with you as we go out and try and take care of our shut-ins. I like to think of them as senior orphans, because so many of them are alone out there. You know, it wasn't that long ago they could sit where you sit. You could fight with them over who the pew belonged to, and now you can't do it, because they've gotten to a place where they can't come any more, you know. They just can't. And so, I've got 40 of them on my list, and these 3 gentlemen behind me have a list, and we go out and try and take care of them, and, unfortunately, due to short staffing and some other challenges and such things, we're not able to get to them all anymore, so Gary Ulrich has put together yet another program beyond Stephen Ministry: Care Givers, Care Receivers. But now he's put together a LEM program, for crying out loud. How would you like to have that for an acronym on the hood of your car? I'm a LEM. What is a LEM. A LEM is a lay Eucharistic minister. It's a person that goes out and shares the body and the blood of Christ, that communes with another, and these people are fascinating people, incredible people, your people, God-oriented people, people of God in Christ. And you know what? Are you feelin' it? Because Gary doesn't know it, but he's recruiting right now. He's recruiting

right now lay Eucharistic ministers, people who want to sign on to maybe go out and visit 5 a month, visit for a half hour, maybe an hour, get to know somebody different, hear what their life was about, let them share it. Some of these people, yeah they may have children and they may have family across the miles, but some of them don't see them for months and months at a time; they sit alone without a visit, unless a pastor comes. And we want to make sure that all of our shut-ins, whether be 60, 70, or 100, all of them get a visit, and we need LEMs to help us do that. Are you feelin' it? Do you want to be a part of a supper that communes with others, that makes a difference? Look at what Christ did in the upper room to show his love and compassion.

My son, the missionary, his theme for the family of The Great Garvey Adventure, he calls it. (He must take after his mother.) But The Great Garvey Adventure is until all have heard. Until all have heard. Gosh, I say Christ it wasn't just about hearing in that upper room, it was about hearing and touching loved ones. Showing a level of intimacy that was second to none. Come amongst us and become a part of that. Become a LEM. Become a lay Eucharistic minister. Recruitment initially sounded like "Uncle Sam needs you." But we're beyond that now. Things have changed, and, you know, we've grown beyond some of those things. But, God bless you, it's such a great honor, such a great opportunity to be a part of you at American Lutheran Church and walk with Pastor Lowell and the team and do the things that we do in the name of God. Amen? And Amen. Now, may the peace of God which surpasses all human understanding, keep our hearts and minds on Christ Jesus. Amen.