

Lectionary 22  
Sermon for Immanuel Lutheran Church and United Lutheran Church  
August 24 and 28, 2016  
Vicar James Miller  
Proverbs 25: 6-7  
Psalm 112  
Hebrews 13: 1-8, 15-16  
Luke 14: 1, 7-14

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Change. Things seem to always be changing. There are new events. Material things wear out and need to be repaired or replaced. There is a constant barrage from the media of the latest breaking stories. Politics: this candidate is leading, no, that one is, this poll suggests this, that poll predicts something else... Changes can make us feel that we have no control in our lives and this can make us afraid.

Two weeks ago my wife and I were back in the area where I grew up, Niagara County, north of Buffalo. They have been experiencing a drought. Hardly any rain had fallen since the beginning of May---three months! Everything is brown. The newspaper referred to it as the drought of a generation. I was talking to a farmer who is about my age. We're each more than two generations old! We remembered something like this when we were young: the burning heat on the scorched, cracked soil. I asked him how he was coping. He said things were bad. Many of his fields had a little growth, but the crops were so small that he just plowed them under. There were other fields where it had been so dry that the seeds never germinated. But you know, farmers tend to be a people of faith and my friend is no exception. He did not despair. He said he knew there would be a break soon. There would be rain. He decided to put those fields to use so he planted his winter wheat early. Think about it: acres and acres dependent on rain. He was helpless but he didn't despair. He had his faith in something solid, something which he knew was true before, now, and forever. And you know, he was not forsaken. By the end of our stay, the weather broke and the thunderstorms arrived.

My sermon today will focus on a verse from our Epistle reading from Hebrews:

“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.”

First I want to speak about some of the qualities, the characteristics of Jesus. Next I want to talk about how God's promises to us cast out doubt and fear and strengthens us to live the lives we are meant to live. Finally, I want to talk about the lives we are called to live as described in our text from Hebrews.

First and foremost is Jesus' purpose.

<sup>16</sup> For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

<sup>17</sup> For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. (John 3:16-17 RSV)

Jesus came into the world to save the world from sin. This was true 2,000 years ago, is true today, and will be true forever. All creation stands in the presence of God who wants to save this creation from sin---each and every person---you and me. This is true for all time.

Jesus said, "I am the light of the world" (John 9: 5)

This light directs us how God wants us to live our lives. This light is sure. This light never goes out or grows dim. And, He tells us that we share in His light:

"You are the light of the world. ...let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." (Mt. 5: 14, 16)

He tells us that we have an obligation not only towards others but also an obligation toward God.

<sup>17</sup> "Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them.

<sup>18</sup> For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished.

<sup>19</sup> Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; (Mat 5:17-19 RSV)

Just as Jesus does not change, so our relationship to God should not change.

We know that Jesus loved us so that He gave His life for us, that we might be saved, and that there is no force that can change this. St. Paul writes,

<sup>38</sup> For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers,  
<sup>39</sup> nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom 8:38-39 RSV)

There are times that we face setbacks. Change forces us to make adjustments in plans. The disciples certainly experienced this when Jesus was crucified. They were downcast and heavy laden, yet Jesus came to them and offered them peace.

<sup>27</sup> Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. (John 14:27 RSV)

These are only some of the qualities of Jesus that are true yesterday, today, and forever. Let us now move on to consider how their certainty casts out the doubts and fears that hold us back from being the people before God who we are called to be.

In the Epistle to the Hebrews we are called to live the kind of life that Jesus lived, the life of serving others with love, kindness, generosity, and mercy, and we are called to live the kind of life which Jesus lived which is holy: being physically and mentally pure, adhering to the Ten Commandments, honoring and obeying God. You might ask, “How can I do these things?” My answer is that you can’t---at least not alone. The psalmist writes:

“Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.” (Ps 127:1).

We really have no hope on our own. But, our passage from Hebrews tells us that we are given great hope and strength from God.

We read, “I will never leave you or forsake you.”

These words are a paraphrase from the first chapter of the book of Joshua. Here’s the background. Moses has led the Israelites out of Egypt, through the desert to the outskirts of the promised land. But there had been a change. Moses was not allowed to enter and he died, leaving Joshua to continue the journey. God says to Joshua,

<sup>5</sup> No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life; as I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you.

<sup>6</sup> Be strong and of good courage; (Jos 1:5-6 RSV)

Moving back to our Hebrews text, we read, “The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can anyone do to me?” This is a paraphrase from a verse in Psalm 118 (vs 6) which, in the original Hebrew language states, “The LORD is the one helping me.” I like this because it conveys action. The LORD is not some assistant, merely available to us. The LORD is the one helping me—helping you----actively---right now with no end in sight!

So now with the promises of the LORD to Joshua and the promise that the LORD is with us, actively helping us, we come to what I feel is the climax, the supreme statement that says all in all: Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.”

So often we are so busy we forget that we live our lives in the presence of God. Now we can interpret this many ways. Is it just that God is watching us; maybe judging us? Yes, this is so. But it’s more than that. God is with us guiding us and giving us strength to

live our lives in accordance with his plan. As I said before, that plan involves using the gifts we have each been given to the best of our abilities to the glory of God. Trying to live a holy life helps this cause.

Consider that line in our text about offering hospitality to others and maybe entertaining angels. Angels are messengers from God. When we offer help to those in need, we can do so prayerfully and maybe ask ourselves, what message is this encounter bringing us from God. Taking time to pray for the needs of others, to pray for strength to get through changes and difficult times, to offer thanks for the gifts we have been given: By trying to live this way we find Jesus in our lives and we welcome, give thanks for this certainty, this sureness that Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

The great 19<sup>th</sup> century British preacher, Charles Haddon Spurgeon characterizes it this way: “The satisfaction that the mariner feels when, after having been tossed about for many a day, he puts his foot upon the solid shore, is just the satisfaction of a Christian when amidst all the changes of this life, he plants the foot of his faith upon such a text as this: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.”

We are asked to follow the example of Jesus. Jesus Christ is the image of God the Father. His life is the model for us of what God wants for His creation: a life of serving and helping others; a life of serving and obeying God. We cannot do this adequately without calling on the strength of Jesus which is in us. We are given courage and great strength to do the Lord’s work in this life. Jesus is with us amidst the changes and Jesus is not affected by the changes. Jesus does not change.

Jesus is with us in the droughts of our lives, and Jesus will be with us when the thunderstorms finally arrive. Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever. Let us take heart! This is good news!

No matter what events pop into our lives unexpectedly. No matter what changes confront us, we are given solid assurance: the unassailable promise of Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today and forever.

I want to close with two verses of the great hymn text by Isaac Watts which express this good news so well:

“O God our help in ages past, our hope for years to come.  
Our shelter from the stormy blast, and our eternal home.  
O God our help in ages past, our hope for years to come.  
Still be our guard while troubles last and our eternal home.” (LBW 320)

Let us give thanks and all glory and honor to God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit now and forever. Amen.