

We are the Church!

King of Glory Lutheran
August 14-15, 2021
Pastor Ruth Ann Loughry

Romans 12:1-5 I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ²Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God — what is good and acceptable and perfect.

³For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. ⁴For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, ⁵so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.

Acts 2:42-47 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.⁴³Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. ⁴⁴All who believed were together and had all things in common; ⁴⁵they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Matthew 16:13-17 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" ¹⁴And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." ¹⁵He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" ¹⁶Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." ¹⁷And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven.

We are members of the Church, individually and collectively. We are one body in Christ, our Lord alone. Worship and fellowship bring us together which God honors. Finally, we are all sinners who have a Savior. Praise God!

May the God of the Church, in the past, the present and the future be with us this day. Amen.

Believe it or not, this sermon began a year ago last April. This sermon began one year ago last April at a Zoom Leadership Team meeting when your leaders knew we weren't going to be able to celebrate Easter inside the building. Together they said, "When this is all over, we must have a celebration! Trumpets. Music. And we're Lutheran so there has to be food! Red jello, deviled eggs...we want to be together."

Well, we all know what happened next. Weeks ran into months. I remember early on; Leo was recording me for a devotion outside the front doors of the church. The camera focused on a sign taped to the door. It said something like, "Church Building Closed Due to the Pandemic."

My devotion that day was about how the Church is not the building, the Church is God's people wherever we are. I believed everything I said, yet I remember how heavy my heart was. As one

of your pastors, called by God to lead and shepherd you, God's people....how were we going to get through this?

We learned a great deal in the last 18 months, haven't we? We came into the 21st century as so many other churches did and took ministry and worship "on-line." For many it worked, for many it just didn't. We tried parking lot worship and honking horns. For many it worked, for many it didn't.

We learned what we really needed from Church through its absence. Corporate, communal worship. Seeing friends. Singing hymns. Sitting under this roof. Donuts! The discovery of what we knew church meant to us came through this unmet need, a longing for what wasn't accessible. Suddenly, our Christian brothers and sisters who worship 'underground' in secret becomes all the more real.

Thus, we did what the earliest followers of Jesus did in the book of Acts. We worshipped in homes. We gave – as they did – to the poor through several food drives and toys at Christmas. We devoted ourselves to God's Word through daily recorded devotions and weekend preaching. Finally, after many months and theological debates, we even began to distribute Holy Communion, believing that God's presence extends through time and space in consecrated elements of bread and wine.

Our community of faith, like every community of faith, lived through closed Church doors with a bold and daring belief in God's presence and strength. *The Church is the Body of Christ, sustained by the Holy Spirit through God's grace in Jesus Christ our Savior.* We dared to continue to be the expression of God's love for the sake of the world, even though we weren't under this roof.

Today, this weekend, at least as we planned it back in April 2020 and in July 2021, was to be a celebration of being the Church who survived the pandemic. We will still celebrate even though cases are on the rise. We don't have the Jello and deviled eggs, but we have trumpet, music, face-painting, crepes, fruit, and of course, Lutheran coffee!

What I am going to say is this. The Church throughout the ages has survived many kinds of suffering, many battles upon her doors. What began with Jesus' death, continued with Paul's imprisonment. We wouldn't have the Book of Revelations without John's exile to the island of Patmos. The Great Persecution of the Church from 303-310 took away Christians rights, clergy were targeted, and all were called to sacrifice to Roman gods (small god).

Coronavirus isn't a persecution in the same way as those of the past, but in any time of tribulation, what grounds the people of God? *The Church is the Body of Christ, sustained by the Holy Spirit through God's grace in Jesus Christ our Savior.* We gather around God's Word and the Sacraments. As Baptized Christians, we are freed to love and serve our neighbor.

This is what sets us apart from everyone else to not only survive but endure and thrive. Rotarians do fabulous work, but they are not the Church. They have a creed they profess, but it says nothing about God. We are the church, set free by God's grace and love through Jesus Christ who is our Savior. God's church exists for sinners and thank the Lord we are one!

The Gospel for today, is Jesus telling Peter, God's church will be built upon him, Peter, the Rock. Notice that. Jesus chose Peter to build His church upon. Peter...the rash-headed, unbelieving, rabbi follower who denied even knowing Jesus when push came to shove.

God's church was founded upon a sinner named Peter. What joy that brings, what courage we can claim, that from the beginning, Jesus chose a sinner to move the church forward. The Church in all her glory, in all her brokenness, in whatever this pandemic or anything else that will come our way, will stand. Not because of what we sinners do or don't do. It will stand because the Church is God's, sustained by the Holy Spirit, through Jesus Christ our Savior.

Every weekend, each Sunday, Luther would call a Little Easter. Each Sunday is a little Easter because we remember Jesus conquered sin, death and hell. If Jesus conquered those, then what have we got to worry about?

Do you remember that old Sunday School song, "I am the Church"?

I am the church, you are the church, we are the church together.
All who follow Jesus, all around the world,
Yes! We're the church together.

If you do, sing along! (Sing song)
Amen!