

Lectionary 13 C 2016
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St. Matthew's Kellers Church
June 26, 2016 Baptized and Set Free

Grace, mercy, and peace to you, from our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ.
Amen

This is tornado season. And, apparently, the season of people standing outside their homes, taking videos of tornadoes heading right toward them. Which makes me want to yell at the computer monitor, "Get inside! Go to the basement! Get out of the way of that tornado! What is wrong with you, dude?" [eye roll] Life is precious. Too precious to risk it, taking a stupid video. [sigh]

God made us with compassion. When we see someone endangering themselves, we want them to stop. Even though the danger is not to us, we feel an urgency on behalf of our neighbor. Like there was an urgency to Jesus' commands to the grieving man and to the family man: Follow me. Don't stop to bury your father. Don't stop to say goodbye. Follow me. Now, Jesus is saying. Not in a day. Not in a few hours. Now. For God has come now. God's grace is here now. God's peace is here now. God's kingdom is in flesh right before you. You can experience the gifts of God right now. Why would you wait? For life is precious. Every minute.

Most of the time, in the Lutheran Church, we baptize infants, as we are baptizing Andre James today. We baptize infants and children because we want them to experience life in Christ as soon as possible. Before they can understand the words, they can experience the love, the inclusion, of God. Let me remind you of a great story. It is recorded in chapter 8 of the Acts of the Apostles, the book that follows the gospels in the Bible. In that incident, a man had come from Ethiopia to worship at the temple in Jerusalem. He was traveling home in a chariot and reading from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah: "like a sheep he was led to the slaughter." The apostle Philip offered to tell the Ethiopian about the man of whom the prophet had written; and Philip told him "the good news about Jesus." Philip told about Jesus, who spoke many good and hard words, who healed many, and who had indeed been led to the slaughter. Then Jesus was raised by God from the dead, appearing to many before ascending into heaven and sending the promised Holy Spirit to his followers, who then started sharing Jesus' good and baptizing people in Jesus' name. After hearing this good news, the Ethiopian exclaimed, "Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?" He didn't want to wait another minute without being baptized. Not another minute lived outside of the baptized life in Christ.

Every minute of living without the grace of God is a waste. Earlier this week, I listened to Terry Gross on NPR's "Fresh Air" interviewing Tony Hale, an Emmy-winning actor. He plays the assistant to the President on "Veep." When Terry asked how Hale met his wife, he said "At church." That surprised her; but she kept coming back to that topic, as she does when she is surprised by something her interviewee says. She asked Hale about how important his faith was to him. He said it was crucial. That his life was deepened immeasurably knowing that a loving God was with him through all the hard times of his life. He couldn't imagine life without faith in Jesus.

But not all of today's readings are so positive in tone. What about the people who reject Jesus? And what Jesus stands for? The first part of today's gospel gives us a clue about rejection of Jesus. The Samaritans do not welcome Jesus. The disciples offer to command divine destruction upon the Samaritans, for this slight. Now Luke doesn't say exactly what Jesus said to the disciples, but since Jesus rebuked them, I'm guessing his response to their oh-so-helpful offer was something like, "NO! You may NOT call on fire to come down from heaven and consume the Samaritans for not welcoming me!" Jesus' attitude? Grace toward the Samaritans. Their disdain toward God's representative should not lead to punishment. Perhaps the disdain is punishment enough. Being without Jesus, being without God's presence is enough of a consequence.

In our second reading, the apostle Paul notes a huge difference between the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit. But I am a little more Lutheran than Paul was. Martin Luther wisely wrote the wonderful adage: *simul justus et peccator*. We are at the same time sinner and saint. And saint not by what we have done, not by our good works, but by what God in Jesus has done for us. I have observed that we can experience many of the fruits of the Spirit at the same time we indulge in the works of the flesh. I am certainly saint and sinner. When I am Facebooking, I try to be patience, kind, peaceful, generous, and faithful. But surprisingly often I engage in quarrels and let others feel the heat of my anger. Yep, same time sinner and saint. Saved by God ~ who loves me in spite of my frequent sinning. That is the God we should not want to feel apart from, not for one minute.

What are we waiting for? When we let a year go by without enjoying the fruits of the Spirit, without delighting in the presence of Christ in our lives, that amounts to [singing] "five hundred twenty five thousand six hundred minutes" without the consolation of the gospel: that God loves us no matter what. And that is [singing] "five hundred twenty five thousand five hundred ninety-nine minutes" too many. Let us live in the freedom of God's grace! Amen