

Sermon for Sunday, May 13, 2018 - "Gotta Go Through It, Together"

Seventh Sunday of Easter

May 13, 2018

Baptism of Menzi Nkambule and Joseph Tiegen

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church and Luther College Ministries

Decorah, Iowa

Rev. Amy Zalk Larson

[Click here to read scripture passages for the day.](#)

Beloved of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus.

It is good to be together today - the Good Shepherd congregation and friends and College Ministries and Norsemen.

It is good and a little strange:

- This congregation loves to welcome Luther students but there aren't usually quite this many!
- This is a wonderful day for College Ministries students as two of your leaders are baptized. And ... you get to celebrate it with people you've never met.

It is a little strange, maybe even a little uncomfortable - especially for the Norsemen way in the back there on folding chairs.

But really, every Sunday it's a little strange that we gather for worship with people who are very different from us. These days, most of us spend most of our time with folks who are a lot like us - people in our own age and racial group, who share our political views and values.

Some of those separations still play out when we worship. Unfortunately, Sunday morning is one of the most segregated times of the week, but worship does bring together a pretty varied mix of people. Teenagers, toddlers, people in their nineties; conservatives and liberals; queer folks and straight folks; hunters and vegans all gather together. At times that can feel uncomfortable.

Yet the thing is - we need each other. Jesus knows that and he prays that we will be one.

In our Gospel reading today, we get to hear Jesus pray for his disciples, including us. Jesus prays not only for those first disciples but for those who will believe because of their word, which means we're included in Jesus' prayer.

As Jesus prays for us all, he doesn't ask for things to get easier for us. He doesn't pray that we'll escape the challenges and struggles in our lives. Jesus knows there's no easy way out. On a bear hunt and in life, "We can't go over it, can't go under it, gotta go through it". We gotta go through the waters, through fire, through pain, through death; but God is always at work to bring us through it all and into fullness of life.

So, Jesus doesn't pray for an escape route. He prays that God would strengthen and protect us for the journey. He prays that God would bring us together, because community is one of God's gifts to get us through.

We need each other as we face all the obstacles and challenges in our lives, our country, and our world today. Sometimes, some of us charge forward too fast and don't notice the quicksand just ahead. Others have to say wait, look, go through this way. Sometimes, some of us stand at the river bank, paralyzed by fear, and others have to provide a push, some encouragement. Most of the time, we need to work together to build bridges across barriers, to forge a new path when it seems there is no way forward. We need the contributions of each person and we have to help each other through, or we all are diminished.

We need each other. So, Jesus prays that we would be one.

Which doesn't mean that he prays we will all be the same. If we were all the same, we wouldn't have what we need to get through. We need diverse gifts and strengths to face the obstacles; we need a wide range of people - all created in the image of God.

Jesus doesn't pray we would all be the same. Instead, he prays that we would be one, just as he and his Father are one. Jesus and the Father are different from one another and they have different roles. What makes them one is not uniformity but rather a loving relationship built on generosity. In his prayer, Jesus speaks about all things the Father has given him and that he gives back to the Father. They are in a mutual relationship of give and take. This is the kind of unity that Jesus prays for us to experience.

We are being given an experience of this unity today in our joint worship service as we share in the baptism of Joseph from North Dakota and Menzi from the Kingdom of Swaziland. We get to witness two people going through the waters into new life. Their journeys of faith and service are an inspiration to the rest of us; and our presence here today is encouragement for them along the way. What a beautiful experience of unity.

This wonderful day has involved give and take, generosity and mutuality. College Ministries folks moved out of your comfort zone into a new location, and came to worship earlier than usual. Norsemen had a really early call time. Good Shepherd folks moved a huge table, set up many extra chairs, and prepared to host lots more people than usual in the Fellowship Hour - all signs of generosity and mutuality.

God is at work in all of this to strengthen our hope and renew our joy. As we go through a time of so much fear, division, and despair in our culture, this experience of unity is a gift of God. This day assures that God is at work to bring us and our whole world through all the pain and into new life.

We can carry on, together.

Thanks be to God.

