

**Sermon for Sunday, July 17, 2022**  
**Sixth Sunday after Pentecost**  
**Traveling With the Spirit - “To Boldly Go Where No One Has Gone Before”**  
**Pastor Karla Wildberger**  
**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church Decorah, Iowa**

**Psalm 127, 2 Timothy 1:1-12, Acts 10: 34-48**

**Grace and peace to you travelers from God our Creator and our Lord and traveling companion, Jesus Christ, Amen.**

To remind us all, our summer theme is “Traveling With the Spirit” and today’s sub-theme is “To Boldly Go Where No One Has Gone Before”. I will have to check to see if we owe the “Star Trek” franchise anything for the use of their phrase 😊 As the original series started with Captain Kirk, the commander of the USS Enterprise, declaring: “Space: the final frontier. These are the voyages of the Starship Enterprise. Its five-year mission: to explore strange new worlds, to seek out new life and new civilizations, to boldly go where no man has gone before.” Our sub-theme for today has perfect timing ... did you all hear about this, see this (hold up photo poster) first image from the James Webb Space Telescope. The deepest view ever obtained in the universe. Filled with galaxies. The several spiked objects are local stars in our own Milky Way. Ignore them. Everything else is an entire galaxy unto itself. Notice that many distort into arcs. These are distant galaxies that reveal the curvature of spacetime caused by the gravity of a cluster of galaxies in the image's center. [[nasa.gov/webbfirstimages](https://nasa.gov/webbfirstimages) description by Neil deGrasse Tyson]

Isn't this amazing!!! If you haven't done it yet, go to the interweb and look at the photos, they really are mind-blowing. And as you look at the photos remember these verses: *“And God said, ‘Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth.’ And it was so.”* (Genesis 1:14-15) And also this: When the word of the Lord came to Abraham, *“Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them ... so shall your descendants be.”* (Genesis 15:5)

God created the heavens and the earth and all that came after! When I look at this photo, I am reminded of how vast the universe is and how tiny I am, how tiny we all are. But even with that, we have ALL been chosen.

When Peter gathers with Cornelius and the others, he preaches “Christ Crucified.” Peter proclaims “that everyone who believes in him (Christ) receives forgiveness of sins through his name.” (Acts 10:43) And then, the following verse: “While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon ALL who heard the word.” The key word there being ALL ... even the Gentiles. And with that, the coming of the Holy Spirit, ALL were then baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. This is the ultimate example of evangelism!!!

Now remember the last two verses of the gospel of Matthew: *“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And, remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”* (Matt. 28:19-20) Cornelius had a vision in which he was to hear what Peter had to say ... to preach. Peter, in turn, is doing exactly what was commanded by Jesus! And this my friends, is evangelism!! And yes, evangelism, like space, is vast and sometimes very scary! But it doesn't have to be. Evangelism can be as easy as talking about the weather; it is as easy as saying a kind word to someone. Truly. And I will admit, for us Lutherans, evangelism is not something we are always good at. I don't know if it is because we know that we are saved by grace through our faith, or if it is because our ancestors were quiet and reserved, which, in turn, keeps us reserved.

We can learn from Peter today: sharing about Christ crucified, explaining what it means to be baptized, that we aren't baptized just because, we are baptized because John first baptized Jesus. In our baptisms, we are marked with the cross of Christ, we are claimed, we are chosen. We are never alone after that. The Holy Spirit is with us.

As we travel with the Holy Spirit, we are taken places that we would never imagine we would go. We are challenged, taken out of our comfort zones to serve others, to love our neighbors. We boldly go where God needs us – and we CAN be bold. Yes, it can be scary as Peter said in verse 26, “I am only a mortal.” In, through and with the Holy Spirit, we can be like Peter and be bold and preach the gospel to ALL we meet. We CAN boldly go where God needs us. Because God does NEED us.

Hear this quote from former Archbishop Desmond Tutu (keeping in mind he knew the world and her people could be ugly): “There may indeed have been moments when God may have regretted creating us. But I am certain there have been many more times when God has looked and seen all these wonderful people who have shone in the dark night of evil and torture and abuses and suffering ... Each of us has a capacity for great good and that is what makes God say it was well worth the risk to bring us into existence. Extraordinarily, God the omnipotent One depends on us, puny, fragile, vulnerable as we may be, to accomplish God's purposes for good, for justice, for forgiveness and healing and wholeness. God has no one but us ... God believes in us. God depends on us to help make this world all that God wants it to be.” (No Future Without Forgiveness, pg 158-159)

So, we gather together. Soon we will share this meal to be reminded of our forgiveness of sins and God's love for us. We gather together to learn from one another, support one another. We gather together to hear God's Word, be reminded of our baptisms so God can send us out to share God's Word with those who have yet to hear it, or who need to hear it again.

Our mission field is as vast as the galaxies in this photo. Please don't be overwhelmed by that. See the beauty in it, the opportunities, the joy in sharing the word, the peace in sharing God's grace. God believes in us and God depends on us to help make this world, this beautiful world, all that God wants it to be.

Amen.