



Except for Jesus

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost
July 4, 2021

Ascension Lutheran Church
Pastor Chris

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

My oldest child has hit the sacred day of 15 years and 6 months, which means, that he has procured his temporary driver's license. Which means, he now wants to practice his theoretical learning in a real-world way. I am not sure my heart can take it. And I have a few questions. In what real-world application, does it make sense to give a theoretical driver the power to command a 4,437-pound vehicle with the ability to go from zero to sixty mph in less than 8 seconds when his father begins to sweat and his father's heart is beating in his throat back at the stop sign, we just left? What do you hold on to? How far can you push your foot through the imaginary brake pedal on the passenger side floor? How fast can one pray? Does God answer prayers faster than my almost sixteen-year-old son can turn the steering wheel? The world now flies by my passenger side window – even if we are only going 25 mph. And somehow, I am supposed to send my sixteen-year-old into the world to drive without me. Merciful Lord – give me strength.

I wonder if that is what Jesus is feeling today when he sends his disciples out two by two and gives them authority over unclean spirits? Jesus has had about two years with the disciples. There has been a fair amount of teaching, but only a few healings. He has eaten with sinners and raised a little girl from the dead. And now, here we are in Chapter 6. No graduation. No certificate of completion. No orientation to this new role. Instead...to the disciples...Jesus offers a "Bon Voyage. Good Luck. Have fun. You can do it." Sounds a lot like Pastor Tony's internship. Wait! What am I talking about? Pastor Tony's internship was a breeze! He had me, after all, training, tending, teaching, bestowing my wisdom all along the way. Well...some days at least. The rest of the time – Pastor Tony was on his own! Except for Jesus.

I am pretty sure the world feels like that for all of us at one time or another. Your first day of school. The first time you jump into the deep end of the pool. That first racing heartbeat when you are around the one you love more than all the others. The pit in your stomach when you lose...when your world falls apart...when you admit you were wrong. When your courage gives way to fear. When the world finds out the worst about you. When you decide it is time to walk in a new direction, knowing you are choosing to leave everything you have ever loved behind you. The world has felt that way. The world can feel that way. The world will feel that way sooner or later. And it will feel like you are entirely on your own...except for Jesus.

Which is why I love what Jesus chooses to do, when he sends his disciples out into the world, sending the disciples out two by two. "Two are better than one," writes the author of Ecclesiastes, "because they have a good return for their labor: ¹⁰ If either of them falls down, one can help the other up." Proverbs 27:17: Iron



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sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another. And Romans 12: ⁴ *For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function,* ⁵ *so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.* In other words – twenty are better than ten – two are better than one – and even when you think you only have yourself to depend on because all others have failed – think again. Even if it feels as if all are lost – there is still Jesus. You are never without a helper and even better that helper is the Savior of the world.

This month marks the re-introduction of the ELCA Youth Gathering into the world of Pastor Chris. Like many other things during the pandemic – the 2021 Youth Gathering was postponed to 2022. Now after 18 months of hibernation, we are beginning to rouse the members of the planning teams. I love young people – but this 18-26 year old age group – they are lousy at email. Text me. DM me on Facebook. Snap me. And I say, “what?” I mean I know what those things mean – but can’t we all communicate by email still. So here is what happens – I send out a group email asking everyone to respond within 48 hours for meeting dates and flight schedules and you know what I get back...CRICKETS! Silence! And it is in moments like that when I feel all alone – except for Jesus that is – but unless Jesus is showing up to help me choreograph dance moves for 3500 people – and perform in place of the 21-person Houseband in the US Bank Stadium – which, of course, I know Jesus could do – I might need a few more team members.

Jesus knows the adventure will be full of challenge. Days when the fear overwhelms the courage. Days when you have been turned away when the story of God’s love doesn’t seem so shiny. Days when even the little victories feel like failures. Days when all the power God has promised to give to you, feels pretty worthless. Just ask me on a day when I show up to offer words of hope when your world has shattered. Most of the time, those words feel pretty empty even as I believe them down to the depths of my bones. Some days the world wins even when we know it is wrong. Some days the power of death wins for a time. Some days the evil around us consumes the good within us. Some days we are entirely and utterly alone...except for Jesus that is.

And in true Jesus, Savior of the World, promise and power – the world moves in a new way. People respond to emails. Hands begin to raise up to volunteer to help. The failures feel more like setbacks. The words spoken don’t sound so hopeless. The ways of the world are proven wrong. The power of death loses to the glory of the resurrection of Jesus. And even the almost 16-year-old straightens out the wheel and pumps the brakes and his father’s heartbeat begins to regulate and the sweating stops and the breathing normalizes.



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And we are reminded once again that we are not left alone – that we have someone to carry us through – it may be the person sitting next to you this morning...but, my friends, thanks be to God. It will always be Jesus.

Amen.