



Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost  
September 26, 2021

Ascension Lutheran Church  
Pastoral Intern Edwin Aparicio

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Grace and peace of the Word made flesh. Amen. Today's gospel reminds me of an experience that I had when I was in El Salvador. I was at a classmate's house working on a university project. The classmate's family had a little business in their house. They sold school supplies, provided typing services, photocopies, and printing of documents. At that time, not all of us had access to a computer. There were few people who had the privilege of having a computer, therefore the demand for this service was high.

That afternoon, a client arrived looking for printing services. We stopped working and my classmate went to serve the customer. And while he was printing the documents, the customer began talking with me. We shook hands, we introduced ourselves, and then we started talking about our background. He was in his last year at the university, my classmate and I were in our first year. So far the conversation was going well, but it began to change when he asked me the question. "Are you a member of a church?" Hooo when he asked me that question, I felt that something was going to happen. I answered him, "Yes, I am a member of a church." Brothers and sisters - that man was so happy that he even shook my hand and congratulated me.

But do you know what happened after that? Still, with his smile on his face, he came and he asked me another question, "Tell me, what is the name of your church?" The healthy conversation that we were having was about to change. I told him, "I am a member at Llano el Coyol Lutheran Church". His face transformed. The man who had previously been congratulating me a few moments before was now cursing at me, telling me that I was going to go to hell. That all Catholics and Lutherans were destined to be condemned unless they repented and joined the Pentecostal church. And don't think he told me with a soft voice, no, that man was very angry. I thought that he was going to hit me.

My classmate was listening to everything and when he gave him the documents he said to him, "Sir, I am Catholic." The customer turned to my friend and said, "Aah, you are Catholic. You are going to be condemned as well, just like your Lutheran friend because salvation is only for us. We are the real Church of Christ." Don't ask me what happened next because that man didn't want to continue talking with us unbelievers and he left the shop in anger.

Brothers and sisters, we heard in today's gospel, how the apostle John, the one that we have known as the beloved disciple, the one who was very close to Jesus, it seems that here he was very far from the teaching of our Lord. The apostle John appears before the Lord to tell him that they had seen a man in the town taking out unclean spirits in the name of Jesus, but because he was not part of the team, they stopped him. John and the others who were with him understood that that gift was only for them who were with Jesus all the time.

As I was thinking about John's actions, I thought, well, was the man that was healing doing something bad? Was he doing something that hurt the community? Was he trying to fool the people? Come on, I don't think so. Perhaps, in the name of Jesus, he was transforming people's lives who were living in torment. He was making a proclamation of the gospel. God's spirit was with him although he was not part of the inner circle. That is what bothered John and those who accompanied him.

These episodes help us to understand that the mission of Jesus began to bear its first fruits outside the circle of the disciples. That man, that healer, was a faithful believer in Jesus. Perhaps maybe his faith in Jesus had come to him through hearing some of the preachings of the Lord, we do not know his name, we do not know his background, but what we do know is that he was a faithful believer, who had accepted with all his heart the proclamation of the good news through hearing, just as we have done. In his letter to the Romans, Paul tells us that "faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes from the preaching of Christ."



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Apparently for a group of the Lord's disciples embracing faith through listening was not enough, it seems that John and those who were with him, believed that the privilege of healing was granted only to them. Some of them had not understood that the kingdom of God is much greater than what they had experienced. Jesus' response leaves them puzzled, they believed that with such actions they would please their teacher, but they did not expect Jesus to adopt such an inclusive perspective instead of restricting others from acting in his name.

In response to their complaint, Jesus told them: Do not stop him, no one can do miracles by calling on my name and then be able to speak ill of me. Sisters and brothers, in Christ there is no place for exclusivity among those of us who call on his name. Jesus exhorts his disciples to adopt a posture of openness towards those who are not within the formal limits of the Christian community, and not to consider them enemies.

John and those who helped him to stop the man had not understood that despite their differences, that man in the town was not only healing but was actually doing God's will in his own way. Our God is a God of diversity. As human beings, we are united into one body regardless of our differences. Here at Ascension, it is a blessing that in this Holy Place we can proclaim the gospel in two different languages. Although there are differences due to cultural aspects, the proclamation and the service lead us to the same path. One God, but many ways to reach him and do his will.

Jesus with his words wanted the disciples to understand that God reveals himself and works in humanity in many ways through us and through people different from us. If we do a survey and we ask each of you to tell us how you have experienced the revelation of God in your lives, for sure we will find different testimonies because God acts differently according to the personal context, but siblings all of those experiences are equally valuable. That diversity is the beauty of God.

May the grace and peace of the Word made flesh be with you all. Amen