



Holy Trinity Sunday
4 June 2023

Ascension Lutheran Church
Rev. Christian W. Marien

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

I spent last Tuesday night and half of Wednesday on the 5th floor, in one of the penthouse suites of the exclusive and pricey Waukesha Memorial. As we continue to watch Covid become smaller and smaller in the rearview mirror, I am pleased to share that the Emergency Department at WMH is far faster. Wait times of minutes instead of hours. Yes, it was my pancreas. And the only reason I stayed overnight was that the ER doc was not exactly thrilled to release me to take care of myself at home. On Wednesday morning, I was feeling better and the doctor who saw me on rounds was okay with discharging me to take care of stuff at home. Someone told me the 5th floor at WMH is a medical floor. So many of the patients are there for observation or stabilization. The average ages, when I walk the halls and peek into rooms, is often in the mid-eighties. So when I hit that floor – I bring the age curve down by about 30 years. On Wednesday morning, as I was settling into my 19th episode of Friends, the door to my room opened and two hospital staff walked in. “We are here from PT,” they said. I was surprised to say the least. “Hi, great, but I am good,” I said. “Well, we are here to get you up and walking,” they said. And I was like, “Ummmm, you have the wrong room.” And they said, “no this is a new program and we help everyone walk the halls, so you can practice your mobility.” “I am 49,” I said, “I walk all the time. So, I think I will pass.” So, they told me they would come back later and I was like fat chance. Luckily before they came back my discharge paperwork came through. I packed up, got dressed, grabbed my backpack and pillow and headed out the door. I walked down the hallway but could not seem to find my bearings to the elevator. I walked through a set of double doors and past a nurse’s station and then stopped. I turned around and realized I was lost. So, walking back up to the nurse’s station I said, “can you tell me how to get to the elevators?” And the nurse looked at me and said, “Where are you trying to go?” And I said, “I am ready to go, it is time to leave.” And she looked at me, saw the pillow and backpack and must have doubted that I was actually supposed to leave the floor. She asked me for my name so she could check in the computer, and then I looked up and saw the sign on the door. “The Wanderguard system is in place.” And I realized, for a moment, I am never getting out of here. This nurse thinks I am trying to escape. And as I saw the doubt begin to build in her facial expression, I held up my discharge papers and declared, “no wait, I am free to go, just need you to point me in the right direction.”

That may be all any of us really need. In the midst of our doubt, we just need someone to point us in the right direction. *28:16 Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw Jesus, they worshiped him; but some doubted.* Today, Jesus is wrapping up his earthly mission. Yes, last week was Pentecost and the story of the gifting of the Holy Spirit. But today, on this Holy Trinity Sunday, we hear Matthew’s version of events to tell the end of the story. Even as Jesus has risen from the dead and shown himself to the disciples, the eleven disciples who gathered on the mountain to worship Jesus, well, some of them have their doubts. Thanks be to God! I mean really, can I get an amen. Out of the eleven disciples, who have seen the resurrected Jesus face-to-face, still some have doubts. As well they should. Three years of training – that’s it. Yes, we saw Jesus heal. Yes, we saw Jesus still the storm. Yes, we saw Jesus teach with authority. And yes, we saw Jesus hunted by the religious leaders. Yes, we saw Jesus betrayed with a kiss. Yes, we saw Jesus arrested. Yes, we saw Jesus hanging on a cross. Yes, we saw Jesus die. Yes, we saw an empty tomb. Yes, we saw Jesus with scars in his hands and side. Yes, we saw it all – but, now what. Jesus is leaving us and the Holy Spirit is coming. Is that enough? Will that be enough? Some of us have doubts Jesus. Some of us have doubts.

Look at our world. Yes, Jesus, I have doubts. Like the nurse who doubted my freedom. Like some of the disciples who doubted Jesus even as they worshipped him. I. Have. Doubts. Here is why. A woman was taking a behind the wheel driver’s test to renew her license. The instructor asked her, “you see your husband and your child in the street, what do you hit?” “My husband,” the woman said. “For the third time ma’am,” the instructor said, “you hit the brakes!” Yes, I have doubts.



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I have doubts about Jesus leaving the future in our hands. When there have been more than 200 mass shootings in the first five months of 2023. I have doubts. When Russia continues to make war in Ukraine and much of the West continues to hand weapons over to Ukraine but does little to work together to move towards peace. I have doubts. When the color of your skin can still get you stopped in Waukesha for driving in a neighborhood you may or may not belong in. I have doubts. When we are afraid of offering safe space for all to be cared for and celebrated – see Waukesha School District. I have doubts. When students, who we know and love – members of this church, are faced with being called names like “monkey” by their peers. I have doubts. When we who have so much, continue to hoard, while others have so little. I have doubts. When cancer eats away at people I love. When children suffer homelessness. When families are torn apart by abuse. When people are exploited through trafficking. When I pay \$4.67 for my Starbucks coffee – 2 or 3 or 4 times a week, when I could add that to my offering to support the work of this church and the lifting-up of our sisters and brothers in El Salvador and Tanzania and in our own backyard through the Hope Center or food pantry. Well. I have doubts. I. Have. Doubts.

28:18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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. I could have used a little more Jesus. I mean, thanks for the reminder – all authority in heaven and on earth is yours. I have no doubts about that. Commanding me, Pastor Tony, soon-to-be Pastor Edwin, all of you, to go 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 you have commanded us. I have no doubts about making disciples and baptizing and teaching them to obey. I have no doubts about your command. But I do doubt you are trusting the right people. Honestly, how we doing? This is where I doubt Jesus. There are days I think we do pretty well with this baptizing and teaching piece. I think the “go” gets us into trouble sometimes. And, well, if we are being honest, so does that “obey” word Jesus casually throws into the end of that last sentence.

What gets me into trouble is when I believe that I am doing pretty good and then decide to go my own way. Jesus, can have all the authority, just leave me be. Welcome to much of our world today. You be you. Let me be me. And as long as we can somewhat get a long – some of the time – well, that’s enough. Is it? I have doubts.

And just when I am about to let my frustration, my cynicism get the best of me. When the doubts invade farther than they should. Jesus leaves us with this. *“And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”* This, I do not doubt. In more moments than I can count, I have known Jesus’ presence in some of the very worst days of my life. When a six month old is laid down to sleep and hours later is rushed to the hospital because he stopped breathing. Jesus is there. When I watched in utter disbelief as rescue workers lifted the body of a junior high student from the deep waters of a lake on the last full day of Adventure camp in 2013. Jesus is there. When the neurosurgeon called to tell me the damage from the stroke my mom suffered was far worse than we first imagined. Jesus is there. When a high school student steps off a freeway overpass because his depression overwhelmed his every thought. Jesus is there. When anyone of you call to share the news that someone you love has died. Jesus is there. Jesus is always there. That is his promise to us. Whether we feel his presence or not. Whether we trust this to be true or not. Jesus is there. I still have doubts. There are days I am the President, Past-President, Vice-President, and Secretary of the doubter’s club. Yes, I have doubts. But not about Jesus. How else can I stand here as one of your pastors tending the deep wounds we have suffered together. Only by the presence of Jesus do I have that strength. And so do you. Time and time again, you have shown me that strength and I am grateful to walk alongside you as pastor. If Jesus taught us anything, he taught us that we are in this, whole thing called life, together. Thanks be to God! Amen.