



## The Adventure Continues

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost  
18 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 Christ. Amen.

Pastor Tony, Jeana Wagner, and I completed our Adventure Camp duties last Wednesday. As is always the case, students show up trusting us and doubting us at the same time. Rock climbing sounds fun until you stand at the bottom of the face of the mountain with a rope attached to your harness that you tied yourself. Will it hold? Did I do it right? Of course, we check before the person begins to climb but still there is a moment of faith that must be captured in order to steel one's nerves to begin to climb. Funny enough, it is not the climbing up the mountain that gives our students the most challenge. It is the lowering down when one must trust the person holding the rope at the bottom as it is slowly released to bring you down the mountain. In order to come down the mountain without injury – you must let go of the mountain and sit in your harness and wait to be lowered.

On the day we hit the river – the rain was falling – so much so that the kayak company did not show up to their office because everyone else, but us, had cancelled their kayak excursions. When Pastor Tony called – Jacob said he could be there in twenty but that everyone else had cancelled. When some of the students heard the news, they too invited us – well, maybe begged is the better word – begged us to cancel. Jeana pointed out that there was a Starbucks just across the street and to my great surprise as Pastor Tony told Jacob we would wait the 20 minutes to get us our kayaks, Pastor Tony drove us to Starbucks. What magic, what subterfuge is this, that Pastor Tony would agree to take our entire group to Starbucks with twenty minutes to spare? And when we entered Starbucks – the line was long and Pastor Tony said, “Well...I am not sure we will have enough time.” And Pastor Chris said, “Pastor Tony you cannot bring the students to Starbucks with the promise of refreshment and then take the offer away.” And Pastor Tony threw up his hands and got in the car to wait while I prayed the baristas could make our orders fast and furious without mistake. And with drinks in hand, we met Jacob and entered the river - a light rain only adding to the adventure. It would be one of our 7<sup>th</sup> grade boys who was so intrigued with the rock face on both sides of the river that he needed pictures – only to find us way behind the rest of the group. That afternoon, we made our way to the zipline canopy.

Students are either very excited or very quiet after the harness and helmet are on and the bus drops you at the first set of stairs to climb. And after climbing the stairs – some 3-4 flights of stairs and looking down the length of the cable – well this is where the adventure begins. It is your choice alone to step off the platform and zip down the cable. The experts go first and then the courageous. But the last to go, before the adults, are the ones who have watched others slide down the cable confirming that the cable and harness are indeed strong enough to hold one of their fellow students. Because we travel with Pastor Tony, we zipline rain or shine and on this day – it rained a lot. When we ask the students where their raingear is – they tell us – back at the house. And Pastor Tony and I smile and tell them start climbing the stairs. The Adventure continues.

Today, the adventure continues for the disciples as well. There are twelve. Peter, and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him. They have been gathered, instructed, and are now, according to Jesus, ready to be sent out in the world. The message is very simple: the power and presence of God is alive, near you, around you and in you. However, the job description is daunting: *As you go, proclaim the good news, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.'* No problem, Jesus. But Jesus is not done. *Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons.* Wait a minute, hey Jesus, can we go over that list again.

It's not like the disciples have not seen Jesus do all those things. In the first 8 chapters of Matthew alone, the disciples saw Jesus heal Peter's mother-in-law, the paralytic lowered through the roof, and the



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centurion's slave. The disciples saw Jesus raise Jairus' daughter from the dead. The disciples saw Jesus cleanse the man with leprosy. And casting out demons was done by Jesus more than once – first in Capernaum and then when the disciples watched as Jesus sent the legion of demons into the herd of pigs in the region of the Gerasenes. It's not like Jesus was sending the disciples out without any experience in healing, resurrection, cleansing, and casting out – the disciples just had to trust in Jesus more than they doubted in themselves. Hear that again – the disciples just had to trust in Jesus more than they doubted in themselves.

In a world that can be hard and scary sometimes, it is tempting to think of the church as a hideout, the place where those of us who know the secret password can gather to celebrate our good fortune. We repeat our favorite stories and eat the food that has been prepared for us, it is easy to think of ourselves as consumers of God's love, chosen people who have been given more good gifts than we can open at one sitting: healing, forgiveness, restoration, resurrection. Then one day the Holy Spirit comes knocking at the door, reminding us that it is time to share. We are not to be consumers after all, but providers of God's love, authorized agents sent out to speak and act in Christ's name. Next to the calling of the disciples, Matthew's story about their sending forth may be one of the most confrontational stories in the entire Bible.

Can we imagine for a moment? There we are perfectly content to be followers, when Jesus comes home all worn out one day with his hair hanging in his face and his clothes ringed with sweat and dirt. He looks around at those of us who have been with him all along and says, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. I need some help, and I'm nominating you." Then he holds his big hands out over our heads and says a prayer that travels down our backbones like a chill, giving us all authority over demons, over disease—even over death—and when he has finished, we open our eyes and look at each other to see if we can tell any difference. Next, we take a deep breath to test whether anything has changed inside. Do we feel wiser, stronger, more capable? Nope. Just blessed, sort of. Just tingly and curious and well, ready—not for anything, just generally ready for whatever is next.

In earlier years at Ascension, I sometimes wondered if we were ready for what the Holy Spirit might be inviting us to be about. I have found myself trusting more and more in the God who calls us and the work God continues to lay before us. Last week, I heard one of the finest sermons I have ever heard. Pastor Tony preached about the present Ascension we all enjoy. He shared the stories of ministries alive and the gift of baptism of Michael and Wilson and Bernardo, Aura, and Ariam. Then Pastor Tony preached about our graduating seniors as we placed towels around their shoulders and reminded them to go out into the world to serve others as Jesus serves us. But Pastor Tony was not done yet – he shared the story of partnership with the Hope Center and our work to tend the homeless, the hungry, and the most vulnerable among us. And just when we thought Pastor Tony was done – he could have easily said, "but wait there's more." In the last piece of his sermon he gave up his title of pastor and took on the mantle of prophet, inviting this congregation to consider what God is calling us to be about in the future – as we considered and ultimately voted to call Edwin as our third pastor on staff. Thanks be to God! Pastor Tony – one of the finest sermons I have ever heard. What none of us realized is that in Pastor Tony's preaching, he was simply setting us up for what was coming today. Jesus, telling us, the adventure continues.

It is simply what we do, when we know who we are and who we are working for, when we are sent out to proclaim the kingdom and to act it out with no money, no shoes, not even a walking stick. Because when it comes down to being a pastor, a prophet, a disciple who is sent to tell the story of God's love, there is really only One, who sends us out with nothing at all and with everything we need: healing, forgiveness, restoration, resurrection. Those are the only things we really have to share with the world, which is just as well, since they are the only things, the world really needs. Amen.