



Third Sunday after Pentecost
9 June 2024

Ascension Lutheran Church
Pastor Chris

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

It is graduation weekend in the Marien house. It is our first graduation. Well, if you don't count 4K, Kindergarten, 5th Grade, and 8th Grade. That does seem to be overkill. But we have pictures of all those events – so I guess we celebrate when we can. Graduation means my wife and I are preparing to send our first child out into the world. Our son is ready to go. Some days we are ready for him to go. Most days, we might keep him around a lot longer. As parents, we have done our best, most days, to love him and to teach him the tools that will help him walk into the world. The world, today, looks very different from the world you or I entered as a high school graduate back in, well, insert your year here.

So, this first-time father of a graduating senior asks the question, “What is left to do? How do you offer protection to this child, now adult, in the eyes of the world? And the answer, I already know with the advice from many of you, is that we cannot offer any protection in the physical sense. They truly are on their own. At least in the short term. I get it. I get it. And also, I want the assurance that he is ready for the world – knowing all along no one is ever truly ready and in the same breath, they are as ready as anybody else. God bless and good luck!

There are a number of emotions swirling in my head this weekend as Andrew graduates. It turns out we have graduated several seniors this year which is causing this pastor to reflect on each of their faces and celebrate and commiserate with their parents. And as it happens, Pastor Edwin and Sarah's nephew Jhonson and niece Daniela also graduated yesterday. While Pastor Tony and Lori's daughter Bella graduates tonight from Mukwonago High School. I share all of this to say there is a lot of emotion moving in the mix of your pastors and then of course among many of you – parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and family friends of graduates near and far.

As I was considering what direction this sermon would take, I kept returning to the psalm for today. Psalm 130 is both a pilgrim psalm and a lament psalm. A pilgrim psalm for those on a journey. A lament for those who feel broken down, alone, abandoned. And what I realized is that these graduates stepping into a new chapter in their lives need to be reminded of what we have taught them and told them all along. When the world comes crashing down around you – there is One who will not leave you alone. (8:30) One who will stand as a “mighty fortress” to borrow the words of Martin Luther.” A sword and shield victorious. For God himself fights by our side.” (10:00) One who stands as the “cornerstone.” One who makes the weak strong in the Savior's Love. One who is the “anchor within the veil, Christ alone.”



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“Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord. Lord, hear my voice.” Or in the words of another translation, “Help God – the bottom has fallen out of my life! Master, hear my cry for help. Who among us has not known that feeling as the world seemed to be crashing down around us?”

My Old Testament professor in seminary told us, there is an implied complaint. Lord, I am about to go under, and you are not paying attention! “Hello, Jesus! Do you see what’s happening here? I am sure you are busy with something, but...any thoughts buddy? Feel the need to step in and lend a hand?” At least that is how I often try to get God’s attention. As if God is unaware of the last of the hairs on my head holding on for dear life. And yet, I am convinced that the silent response to my prayers is not God’s abandonment but God’s patience with me, until I quit gasping for help and begin asking God to do what God does best – answer the deepest need I am not always ready to whisper in my prayers. When my mother had her surgery – healing became heartache became hope of resurrection joy. When Bob Ward suffered a stroke on the way to Tanzania – helplessness became heavy lifting (mainly for Pastor Tony) became full healing. The mighty fortress, the cornerstone is always ready to act on our behalf – but so often what we think we need or want is far less than what God is ready to offer to us.

The problem of the one crying out is not just a problem of physical pain, or depression, or even of being weighed down with sin. The one praying doesn’t even “have” a problem at all. In the psalm it is a matter of life – or death. The psalmist looks inward and sees only failure. But when the psalmist looks to God there is a glimmer of forgiveness and hope. But with you there is forgiveness, so that we can, with reverence, serve you. I wait for the LORD, my whole being waits, and in his word, I put my hope. The word we use around the halls of high school students, especially as prepare to welcome 15,000 high school students to the youth gathering, is trust. “Hope” can be too difficult to hold on to. “Believe” sounds too demanding. But “trust” can actually reach out to someone who is hurting or hungry and in need of a glimmer of new life, of resurrection waiting to be revealed. Trust is typical for a psalm of lament. The image of the watchman, weary after the long hours of the night and eager for the first rays of morning light. The psalmist longs for the Lord even more intensely than those who watch for the morning. As parents, we have invested the long, weary hours of the night wondering about the direction our newborn, now graduated high school senior, would take. And still we wait. It seems as if the job of parent, aunt, uncle, grandparent of children at every age, is to keep vigil long into the night and sometimes long into the next day. I have held the hands of enough of you to know this is true. Yes, they are on their own and still we hold our breath, and we pray.



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When Andrew was two, a large plastic orange basketball shaped toy box arrived in our home. The top came off and Andrew would often climb inside. Every so often, when he would climb in – we would put the top back on and then he would jump out and we would yell surprise. It seems as if now we are getting to repeat this game but in the adult version. I am not sure how I feel about the upgrade as we transition into adulthood. But the psalmist has an answer for our waiting in this time of transition.

Israel, put your hope in the LORD, for with the LORD is unfailing love and with him is full redemption. Or to hear it another way, “People of God, wait and watch for God – with God’s arrival comes love, with God’s arrival comes generous redemption.” I sometimes want to argue with how quickly the psalmist goes from “God, you do not care” to “God, how wonderful that you promise to show up.” How easily it seems that we move from “I cry out” of the person about to go under to “I hope” of the person who expects to be rescued. And what I can find, comes in verse 7. “Israel, put your hope in the Lord, for with the Lord there is unfailing love and with the Lord there is great power to redeem. This is the kind of love that never gives up. Like the shepherd who leaves the 99 to look for the one. Like the woman who searches her whole house for the lost coin. Like the father who kept hoping, waiting, watching, for his son to come home. This is the kind of love God offers to us again and again and again. The kind of love that hears our cry, assures us we are not alone, and promises to be fortress/cornerstone for all of us who wander in the world and for all of us who keep watch into the long hours of the night eager for the first rays of morning light. God’s promise to us is that the light will come in this life or life to come. Thanks be to God! Amen.