



Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost
24 August 2025

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.

We are just weeks back from El Salvador. Our mission trip to walk alongside our sister parish of El Milagro de Dios was powerful in all the ways one might expect it to be. Returning to Pastor Edwin's homeland and experiencing El Salvador through the eyes of one of our young people, Jhonson, on his first return to his homeland, since becoming a citizen of this country, was also great fun and tender and deeply meaningful. At different moments in our mission trip, we found ourselves completely dependent on the presence and promise of God.

Outside of San Jorge, we stayed in a hotel in Usulután. 6 floors and an elevator. It was much more than I expected on this mission trip. On our last day, as we were packing and preparing to leave for a Sunday of worship and celebration in San Jorge, our bags were being loaded into our minibuses for the travel ahead. My wife and youngest daughter rolled their suitcases into the elevator – all 4' by 4' of elevator – some 16 square feet. The door closed and "immediately" the power went out. I heard my wife scream help and realized it was coming from above my floor. The elevator had traveled up to the 6th floor and then stopped when the power went out. I walked into the hallway, heard my wife yell help again and then I heard Pastor Tony. "It's okay Ileen I am right outside the elevator." And I thought to myself, "it is certainly not okay." The power is out. The elevator is stuck on the 6th floor, and I am guessing that when the power went out that the lights and the fan inside the elevator also went dark. I then considered how long it would take the fire department to reach our hotel. And since Pastor Tony had it under control – I could go back to my room and finish packing. But as I stuffed the next item into my suitcase, I had another thought. Does Usulután have a fire department? Who rescues people from possibly the only elevator in the city? What will we do if the power does not come back on? And as I was pondering my wife and daughter slowly melting in the metal box – to my great surprise and relief – the power came on and the elevator doors opened apparently – because, well, I did not go up to check and they both were on the plane coming home to Wisconsin. But I realized, in that moment, in the elevator with the power out, all I would be able to do is pray and hope Pastor Tony could keep them calm. It is not the first time in my life that I have known the complete dependence on the presence and promise of God, but it was, for all practical purposes, the first time I knew complete dependence on behalf of my wife and daughter.

It is the Sabbath. The day set aside for worship and for rest. Not one of us should be surprised that Jesus is teaching in the synagogue, on the Sabbath, as rabbis are known to do. And again, no one should be surprised, that on the Sabbath, in the synagogue, a woman arrives in need of healing. It is different in these days of life. In the midst of deep need for healing, for understanding, for a moment or word of peace – some choose to show up here in worship. Others choose to stay away so as not to cry during worship. For the life of me, I will never understand, avoiding the church or a time of worship in the midst of great need – but I think I get paid to say such things. So, when this woman arrives, crippled for some 18 years, by a spirit – Jesus wastes no time in freeing her from the spirit. He calls to her, "woman, you are set free from your ailment." He lays hands on her and Luke tells us that "immediately" she is healed. Wait! Hold on! What did Luke say? Immediately, she stood up straight and began to praise God. This is your reminder...that whenever Luke uses the word "immediately" in a story – whatever is happening must be important.

- In Luke 5:25, after Jesus forgives a paralyzed man's sins, "immediately" the man stood up before them, took what he had been lying on, and went home glorifying God.
- In Luke 1:64, After Zechariah wrote on the tablet that his son's name would be John, "immediately" his mouth was opened and his tongue set free, and he began to speak, praising God.
- In Luke 19, ⁵ When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." ⁶ So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.
- In Luke 18:43, after Jesus restored his sight, the blind man "immediately" received his sight and followed Jesus, glorifying God".



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- In Luke 13:13, a woman who had been bent over for many years was made straight "immediately" after Jesus laid hands on her and she began to glorify God.

She stands up straight and begins to praise God. I kinda want more fireworks. It has been 18 years for pete's sake. Maybe something like, "bing, bang boom – now you are free so run right out of the room." Or "God of all grace, give this woman some space." Perhaps I have been sipping too much water from the acronym pool here at Ascension – JAM, BLAST, JUMP, JOLT, CRASH. I am just saying I could have used the gimmick here Jesus. Something to remind us of this woman and the choice you made to break the rules on the Sabbath day of rest to bring healing and restore her to the fullness of life. Okay, okay – there is a gimmick. Anyone know what it is that Luke does? "Immediately." That is the gimmick to point us to what is important in Luke's story of the Savior of the world. But hold on, we know so little about this woman. We do not know if she was a regular member worshiping in this synagogue on the day Jesus just happened to show up and begin teaching. We do not know whether or not she had received word that this rabbi, who apparently can heal, would be present on this Sabbath day. We do not know whether or not this woman gave offering, served in the synagogue soup kitchen, or was even a member of the synagogue in good standing. All we know, all Luke tells us, is that this woman appeared in the synagogue and upon seeing her – Jesus healed her "immediately." And she began to give glory to God.

This might be our reminder that the welcome we offer on behalf of God, the love we share on behalf of God, the promise we speak on behalf of God – well it should happen "immediately" in this community of faith and in each of our lives with everyone we meet, without waiting for credentials or sign of worthiness or whether or not someone knows the secret password to get to communion. I was reminded that this week that there are still plenty of churches and even more Christians who prefer to regulate and restrict and restrain the presence and promise of God for those who might have the greatest need of God's redemption in their lives at any given moment. Would the woman bent over for 18 years been turned away from God's grace in some of the churches we know today? Of course – if her ailment was her divorce or her fatherless child or her gender identity or her lack of documentation – of course she would be restricted from God's table of grace – the one place she needs to be most – the one place no one has power to restrain – but oh how our some of our siblings keep trying – telling us if we are not this or that we cannot receive. I can only imagine what Luke would say, "immediately" the woman was welcomed at the table to receive the presence of God in bread and wine. Immediately, your sins were forgiven, as Jesus died on the cross. Immediately, your place in heaven was secured as the stone was rolled away. Immediately, the gates of heaven will open to you when you close your eyes in this life. Immediately, you will be reunited with those who wait for you in the Kingdom. Immediately. Immediately. Immediately. If you are feeling rushed, take a breath. God is the One who is rushing around. You only need be reminded to pay attention, whenever you hear Luke say, "immediately."

It turns out that my youngest child, might have more faith than all the rest of us. When the power was restored, and the doors of the elevator opened up "immediately," my wife and daughter stepped out into the freedom of the 6th floor landing into the waiting arms of Pastor Tony. I was still packing. My wife took it upon herself to drag her luggage down 6 flights of stairs rather than trusting the power supply to the elevator to get her back down to the ground floor. My daughter, on the other hand, "immediately" got back in the elevator and took her luggage down to the first floor. I am happy to give thanks to God for my wife's practical thinking and my daughter's great faithfulness in the promise of God to "immediately" deliver her down to the first floor without interruption. I am quite sure that both my wife and my daughter's prayers joined my own that morning, as we gathered to praise God in a warm candlelit sanctuary in San Jorge, where the power was still out. A reminder that not all things happen immediately in this life – that not all things need to happen with breakneck speed. A reminder for us that sometimes God's timing is exasperating and frustrating by our watches. Until we remember the words of the psalmist, in Psalm 90: a day is like a thousand years and a thousand years like a day. The Lord is not restrained by time. I get it. And yet, there are days, and extra "immediately" might be helpful. Thanks be to God. Amen.