



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

It is a glorious time of year in the West High School experience. It is the annual TP Wars between the junior and senior class. My daughter, being a junior, watched her older brother compete in white, hopefully really cheap, toilet paper and could not wait for her chance. On the first night we were decorated with toilet paper streamers that covered our trees and blanketed our flowerbeds like new fallen snow. The next night, my daughter was on the hunt for the houses of graduating seniors. Points are awarded for each house decorated and whether or not you are discovered in your decorating – which is much more difficult nowadays with the arrival of video doorbells at most front doors – is it any wonder why video doorbells have become so popular? She came home triumphant with her decorating “success.” And her father said, “but now they will come after us.” I was then informed that there are points awarded for catching the decorators in action and additional points for tackling one of the decorators to the ground. So, when I saw a car slowly drive up by our front yard and turn off their light last Monday, I was on alert. Since I had just come home from the Chosen study after yet another funeral – I was hopeful to eat dinner but decided protecting the house was more important. I walked out the front door and caught a decorator gathering her toilet paper before leaving the back seat of the car she was in. I yelled that I was going to tackle whoever was coming on my property because my daughter needed extra points for the Junior team. And I heard a female student say, “please don’t tackle me, I promise I will go to church with my grandma next Sunday.” And I was like, “what?” So now I am intrigued and I laughed and continued walking towards the car. As I got closer, I said, “you should not lie to a pastor.” And pointed at the clerical collar I was still wearing. Her eyes got as big as saucers, and I said, “church is at 8:30 and 10:45am next Sunday.” She then asked, if she could decorate our neighbor’s house. I told her I had no opinion, but I thought our neighbor was watching from the windows.

“Increase our faith”, the disciples tell Jesus. I am pretty sure the girl trying to decorate our house, received a ton more faith when she saw the pastor walking towards her ready to tackle her for extra points for the Junior Class team of 2025.

It is a little unfair to begin this reading with verse 5. The disciples ask Jesus to increase their faith. But why? Well, in the earlier verses of chapter 4 – Jesus offers these words: “Things that cause people to stumble are bound to come, but woe to anyone through whom they come. <sup>2</sup> It would be better for them to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around their neck than to cause one of these little ones to stumble. <sup>3</sup> So watch yourselves. “If your brother or sister<sup>[a]</sup> sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them. <sup>4</sup> Even if they sin against you seven times in a day and seven times come back to you saying ‘I repent,’ you must forgive them.” And now it all makes sense that the next words from the disciples to Jesus were their request to “increase our faith.” Presented with the difficult, almost impossible teaching to forgive those who repent. Not once, not twice, but seven times in a day if someone sins against you and returns to you in repentance. Other translations of the Bible, translate the disciples’ request to Jesus as “you have got to be kidding” and my favorite translation “yeah right Jesus, seven times in a day, not a chance!”

I wonder if those translations sound more like your own hearts and minds. If they repent, I might forgive them once – but seven times they sin and seven times they repent – and I am just supposed to forgive them every time – you have got to be kidding! Except Jesus is not. The number 7 is no arbitrary number – for Jesus, Jewish tradition, and Biblical teaching – the number 7 is the number of perfection – as in regardless of how many times someone sins against you – if they repent, you are to forgive. Then Jesus, we too will ask you to “increase our faith.”



Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost  
5 October 2025

Ascension Lutheran Church  
Rev. Christian W. Marien

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I was struck by my reaction to the news that Dr. Jane Goodall, famous primatologist, had died this past week at the age of 91. She seemed to have been around forever – always talking about monkeys – mainly chimpanzees. I watched a documentary years ago about her work, which began in the wilds of Tanzania, no less. At a certain point she offered these words: “Just remember that every day you live, you make an impact on the planet. You can’t help making an impact, and you have a choice as to what sort of impact you make.” It is absolutely true. Whether the planet is the nature God has given us to tend or another human being God has given us to love – you can’t help but make an impact, and you have a choice as to what sort of impact you make. Imagine your impact on someone’s life, should you offer forgiveness for their repentance. Imagine your impact on someone’s life, should you offer forgiveness for their repentance not once in a day but seven times in a day for every act of repentance. Might their eyes get as big as saucers, and then you could remind them that church is at 8:30 and 10:45 the next Sunday here at Ascension.

At JOLT, two Thursdays ago, the students divided by grades into small groups. We spent time sharing what made church, our church, special. There were many answers shared, but my favorite came from a 6<sup>th</sup> grader who is new to the church. One of the students shared that she liked when Pastor Tony preached because his sermons were shorter than Pastor Chris’ sermons. And before I could answer, this new-to-Ascension 6<sup>th</sup> grader said, “oh no, you are all so lucky. All the pastors here at Ascension preach with energy, even excitement. At my last church, the pastor preached for 30 minutes, and I could barely keep my eyes open.” Yes! Hallelujah! And a little child shall lead them. You heard it here first! You are lucky! I could not pass up the opportunity to share such good news with you.

Here at Ascension today, we celebrate who we are with a ministry fair that highlights much of the ministry we share together inside and outside these walls. Today is your opportunity to, once again, find some additional meaning, some purpose for your life of faith. How we walk alongside each other speaks volumes to the world around us. A reminder that we are blessed to be a blessing. And with that theme, I offer the words of author Jan Richardson:

*And the table will be wide.  
And the welcome will be wide.  
And the arms will open wide to gather us in.  
And our hearts will open wide to receive.  
And we will come as children who trust there is enough.  
And we will come unhindered and free.  
And our aching will be met with bread.  
And our sorrow will be met with wine.  
And we will open our hands to the feast without shame.  
And we will turn toward each other without fear.  
And we will give up our appetite for despair.  
And we will taste and know of delight.  
And we will become bread for a hungry world.  
And we will become drink for those who thirst.  
And the blessed will become the blessing.  
And everywhere will be the feast.*

Increase our faith. My friends, you already have more than enough. Let go of what holds you back and come alive. Get up and rise. Amen.