

Rev. Danny Mackey  
Sixth Sunday of Easter – Rogate  
May 22, 2022  
John 16:23–33  
Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church in Muncie, Ind.

Christ is risen! [He is risen, indeed!] Alleluia!

*[Jesus said,] “I have said these things to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”*

When I was little, I went to church every day. That’s right: every day. On May 4, 1985, when I was eight years old, I received Holy Communion for the first time. Soon after, I trained as an altar boy. I loved being an altar boy. I got to help the priest put on his robes, saying prayers with each vestment. I got to ring the bells at the beginning of service. I got to hold the lectionary as Father Smith read out of it. I got to take the offering to the altar. I got to wash the priest’s hands before the Words of Institution. I got to ring the bells again at the Consecration. I got to watch everyone’s faces as they came to the Lord’s Supper (including my uncle Stanley, who’d wink at me). I rang the bells at the end of service. And I did it every day. I walked to church every morning to serve at Mass. I wanted nothing more than that. I wanted to be a priest.

When we moved from Wisconsin to Arizona, I didn’t get to do that anymore. Our new church already had its altar boys. I could be part of the rotation, but I couldn’t serve at Mass every day of the week. I went from a small congregation to a huge one. I got lost in the crowd. Overlooked, because I hadn’t been there my whole life. And so I went to church every Sunday, instead of every day, and not always willingly. I went to church not because I wanted to, but because my parents—my mother, really—made me. Every Sunday morning she would holler and scream at us to get out of bed and get ready for church. She threatened and cajoled. She bribed and promised. She smacked our bottoms and stroked our egos to get us into the pews.

She knew that even if we didn’t want to go to church—she knew that we needed to be in church. The saying is true: “There is no salvation outside the Church.” We need the Church. The Church is our spiritual mother, who has given birth to us in the waters of Holy Baptism. She nurses us with Word preached in its truth and purity. She feeds us with the Lord’s Supper. To reject our mother (even our earthly mothers) is to reject life itself. It’s our

mothers that give us life and nurture us. They are the wonderful and gracious means our Lord and Creator, our heavenly Father, uses to give life.

Church was safe for me. Even when I messed up—and, boy, did I mess up, I knew that I could be forgiven. One time, just before I became an altar boy, I took Communion but didn't eat it. I hid it. I don't know why, but I did. One of my classmates, Julie Krimmer, saw. So she told our teacher. Sister Claire decided that Father Smith needed to talk to me about it. Boy, was I in trouble!

At the end of the school day, I had to go to the vestry and speak with the priest. I was super nervous. I remember stepping into the room. He was sitting in a chair, next to a small table, and invited me to sit opposite him. Which was weird. It was first time an adult had me sit with him. Sure, adults had stood and yelled at me while I sat, or they sat and yelled at me while I stood. But Father Smith wanted to have a conversation. He didn't yell. He asked me to sit down—which, of course, I did—and he asked me, "Danny, why did you not eat the Eucharist?" I really didn't know why. It was just something I did. Kids (and sometimes adults) can be like that. I came up with something lame about wanting a snack for later. I don't think he believed me. But he loved me. He was my pastor. He smiled and went over to his lunch sack and pulled out a Ziploc baggie of Oreos. "Well, if you want a snack, here you go. These are better, anyway. And if you ever want another snack, just come by and ask." Instead of recriminations and accusations, Father Smith loved me and forgave me. He covered my sin with love. He even allowed a child to save face. I never did go get a snack from him, but I also never abused the Sacrament again.

Our faith and Christianity aren't so hard. They're not esoteric or so otherworldly that we can't get it. While we talk about God's working being mysterious, His Word is plain and straightforward. When we hear today's text, it seems a little confused and rambling. That's because the disciples were confused. It's because they were rambling. Some things we talk about in figures of speech because they're hard to understand. But others are plain speech.

Why are they hard to understand? Sometimes it's because we're like little children. We haven't the experience. Nothing to compare it to. It's like starting a very intense and involved movie in the middle. You have no idea what's going on. That's how it is for us at times. But other times it's because we're too fragile—fragile because of our sin. We can't handle what God has to say to us. So He and His ministers explain it in a figures of speech.

The truth of something is always good, but that doesn't mean it's easy. It doesn't mean it's nice, or even kind. So God cushions His speech to us. He invites us to sit down. He asks us the question. He offers to reason with us. And even when we say something foolish, He responds in love.

AND HE PROMISES THAT HIS LOVE IS ENOUGH.

IT'S ENOUGH TO OVERCOME THE WORLD.

The fact that He takes the time to speak with us. The fact that He listens to us in holy conversation. The fact that He has taken on our own condition to relate to us. These are all signs of His love. Jesus did this with His disciples—His confused and rambling disciples. Jesus has done this with us. He hears our prayers and speaks His Word through our fellow Christians. In my stories, Jesus cared for me through four people. My mom, who made me get to church, because she knew how important it is. Julie Krimmer, my classmate, who told on me—not to tattle but because she thought so highly of the Sacrament. Sister Claire, my teacher, who sent me to the priest, because she knew he would handle it best. Father Smith, who tenderly dealt with me. Jesus used all of them to love me.

And that love drew me ever closer to the Church. That's why I went to church every day. And though I withdrew from the Church—for some really silly reasons, I'll admit—it was that same love that drew me back again.

When I became Lutheran—and I've been Lutheran now for 25 years—that compulsion to serve the Lord kicked back in. I wanted to be a priest again. Or, what we Lutherans call a pastor. I wanted to love God's people just as Father Smith had shown Christ's love to me. Not to judge. Not to accuse. God's holy Law does that. But to forgive and to pardon. To uplift and give life and purpose. What I came to better understand as the Gospel. Christ and Him crucified. Christ risen and ascended. All so that we may live and our joy be made full. Preaching that is what I felt the need to do. Who to be. The Gospel and Christ's peace is what I longed to share.

I delight in coming to church. To see you, whether there are many of you or few, and to speak God's love and peace in Christ is my greatest pleasure. It's not always easy. Sometimes it's downright hard. Sometimes I get to speak it plainly. Other times I have to rely more on figures of speech. But the peace of Christ, which overcomes the world, is the same peace. The love of Christ is the same love. It's a love we need and a peace we are given

to share. And because we love Christ, because we so highly regard Him—as high as the heavens because He is now before the Father—we are given to kindly and tenderly care for one another. No recriminations. No accusations. No judgment or condemnation. Just fellow sinners desirous of life and love and peace and salvation. That’s why we sit together. That’s what we share in here at church. And church is the place our God has given for us to get all these great things.

So, continue to come to church. Hear Christ’s Word and receive it with a cheerful heart. Our Lord desires that we reason with Him. Also, love one another. “If you love one another,” says Jesus, “then they will know that you are My disciples.” Pray for one another and for the world. And, lastly, ask Jesus for purpose and life. He will answer, so your joy may be full.

In Jesus’ name.

Christ is risen! [He is risen, indeed!] Alleluia!