

Preaching for Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd

Pastor Scott Trevithick

Date: May 31, 2020 Year A Pentecost Sunday

Text: Acts 2:1-21

Title: The Building is Closed, but the Church is Open

Focus: By God's Spirit at work in the Church, may we continue to be open to new ways of being the Church, despite the physical restrictions. The Church is not prevented from praying, worshiping, caring for one another, and being God's people in the world.

Acts 2:1-21

¹ When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ² And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³ Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

⁵ Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. ⁶ And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. ⁷ Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" ⁸ And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? ⁹ Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, ¹¹ Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." ¹² All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" ¹³ But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."

¹⁴ But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. ¹⁵ Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. ¹⁶ No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: ¹⁷ "In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. ¹⁸ Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. ¹⁹ And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. ²⁰ The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day. ²¹ Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

Open or Closed?

Recorded from the front steps outside the entry to the Welcome Space.

Children's Rhyme: *Here is the Church, Here is the Steeple. Open the Doors and See all the People.*

So here I am sitting on the front steps outside of Good Shepherd. We have not physically gathered for in-person worship here since Sunday, March 15. Since then, as you know, we have been providing a worship recording to allow Good Shepherd folks to worship safely from their homes or wherever they may be.

But this children's rhyme and our physically closed doors prompt some questions:

- Who or what is the Church?
- Are we, and other congregations across the country, "Open?" or are we "Closed?"
- What does it mean to be the Church when you cannot "see all the people?"
- How are we actively being the church even while we cannot "see all the people?"
 - How are we living that out?
 - How are we moving that—the idea of being the church out in the world-- from a discussion to an actuality—to a lived-out reality?

We'll explore these questions in today's worship.

We Love this Church Building

Recorded from Shepherd Hall, old sanctuary space

Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd took root when Pastor Jim Oslund arrived in May of 1947 to begin a new mission church. The first worship service was held June 15 of that year and the church was chartered Dec. 7, 1947 with 87 charter members.

A building fund campaign was initiated in 1949 and the property for the church was purchased thereafter. Groundbreaking for the church building was held Sept. 16, 1951. Nine-year-old Larry Struve, still active in our congregation today, is in this picture, standing beside his dad.

- *Insert photo for Groundbreaking 1951*

The first worship service held in new sanctuary on Dec. 5, 1952

- *Insert photo of new building (at least this photo; the others as available)*
- *building lot*
- *sanctuary with children and leaders*
- *view of chancel area*

What we now know as Shepherd Hall was the original sanctuary, the worship space. The chancel, which is the raised area where the pastor and choir members and other worship leaders sit and where the pulpit and altar and Communion rail and baptismal font are, was over there on the north side, where the kitchen is now located.

The space was and is not huge. There were oak pews facing the chancel area to the north. There was one center aisle and no side aisles. If you look at the brick as you walk to the south toward California Avenue, you can see that the brick changes. This brick that is more uniform in color shows where there was an addition which extended the building as far as possible toward California.

My favorite thing about this space is the stained glass windows. Depending on the time of day and how the light is, they can be quite dramatic. When it is dark at night and the lights are on inside the building, the windows are more striking from the outside as the light shines through them that way.

Recorded in present sanctuary/worship space. Start recording from in front of the font in the primary aisle near the doors

This sanctuary was completed and dedicated in 2012. To God's glory, its completion was the product of the time, energy, creativity, and financial support of a great number of people--people who followed in the footsteps of similarly determined people before them.

I'm personally fond of this space for lots of reasons. Just a couple things I'll mention:

- The baptismal font and the beauty of the blue glass bowl and its central place as you enter the sanctuary, symbolizing the gracious welcome of God in the sacrament itself.
- The broad, expansive space itself.
- The centrality of the cross and the additional focal points of the
 - ambo or pulpit and the
 - table or altar.

The visual centrality of these objects emphasizes their theological significance:

- The cross is a sign of God's love in Jesus and
- Together the visual signs of the font and the altar or table remind us of the sacraments as a means of experiencing the grace of God
- The ambo or pulpit points to the hearing and the preaching of scripture as the Word of God as blessed by the Spirit.

The colors in the worship space are more muted. That may seem bland to some, but I think it stimulates our creativity and flexibility. The more muted colors provide a fitting backdrop for the colors of liturgical seasons and special worship events. Whether it's banners, or paraments on the ambo and table/altar, or Becky Bogard's inspired and beautiful scenes on the south-facing glass, the sanctuary provides the space for us to celebrate the particular festival or season, tell a story, or supplement and enhance other parts of our worship.

This building, this physical space, is where we

- Gather
- Welcome newcomers
- Baptize infants, children, and adults and nurture them in faith
- Give thanks to God for the life of beloved saints
- Offer our worship of God in prayer, song, reflection, and self-giving offering
- Are reminded of the grace of God experienced through the sacraments
- Are strengthened from that gathering, fellowship, and worship and are sent out to serve God in the world

In short, we love this space. We love this place. This is a place where we encounter God, are united with other believers, and are sent out. But, as much as we love this space, the Church is not about the building. It's about knowing and worshipping God, being transformed by that encounter, and living that out in the world.

You are Called to be the Church in the Place where you spend your time

Recorded at Virginia Lake

Last week I talked about the benefit of creating some new routines when you have had your schedule and routines disrupted by the Safe at Home directive. A daily morning walk is one of my healthy habits or daily routines.

Good Shepherd member Grace Schoenfeld has been taking a daily walk at Virginia Lake Park for 44 years. Yes, that's amazing. She told me the story this week of when she got started and how she knows how many years it has been.

Another thing she told me is that her husband Bud, who worked in construction, built the walking path around the lake. And that's the path Grace continues to walk every day. (At 5 a.m.!)

She tracks the days and seasons by her daily walks. She said the babies are out right now—the ducks and geese are leading their ducklings and goslings. And she said she's seen a lot of changes over the 44 years that she's been walking at the lake.

- What are the things that you do every day?
- Is there a way that you could see yourself as a part of the Church as you spend your time doing that thing?
- How do you love God and neighbor in that place or when you're doing that thing?

The point is that you are called to be the Church in the place where you spend your time every week. You are called to love God and love neighbor in the place where you spend your time.

Recorded at Jessie Beck Elementary School:

My kids are now in college, but when they were younger they attended Jessie Beck Elementary School. Today in worship, we are giving thanks for classroom

teachers and other educators as the school year comes to a close. The role of a teacher is always important and always challenging, and this year both those things are even more true.

As we developed this list of active educators in the church, we counted 37 people—and there are many more within the congregation who are retired after being a teacher or other educator. With that large number of educators, I don't know of any other profession or calling that we have in greater number at Good Shepherd.

Part of the reason we are taking a moment to thank teachers today, beside what I just said about the particular challenge of being a teacher this year is to underscore the idea of “the priesthood of all believers”—that each of us is called to some form of ministry and that we function as the Body of Christ in the world when we are faithfully serving as a teacher or in however else we spend our time.

We Respond by Serving at Unexpected Times

Recorded at Walgreen's on Virginia and Moana

I recorded at Virginia Lake and at Jessie Beck School to emphasize that we are called to be the Church in the places where we spend the most time.

What about unexpected opportunities? What about opportunities to show kindness or display the love of God for the world when something unexpected pops up?

I'm now in front of the Walgreen's because that kind of opportunity presented itself to a Good Shepherd worshiper last week and he told me about it and he gave me permission to tell you. Here's what he said:

Via email May 19:

Good afternoon Pastor Scott. I wanted to email you and ask you a question. Today I was at the Walgreens on the corner of Moana and Virginia. Out front there was a homeless man, probably late 20s to early 30s with his dog, a German shepherd.

For many reasons, the situation resonated with me so deeply and hit a nerve, how mental health and addiction treatment is so porous in this country that this happens, everywhere. So I'm emailing you as soon as I've walked in the door to see what if anything the church has available where I can donate my time and/or effort to help those who are homeless and in need regardless of addiction or mental health status. I can't sit idly by and watch this happen and not try to be a part of the solution, even if my efforts are small. Thank you for taking the time to read this.

(This was an email from a Good Shepherd worshiper)

Here's My Reply:

Thank you for your thoughtful heart, *name*. GS provides some direct assistance to those in need who come to our door through what we call **Project Lazarus**. It's typically modest help, like a gift card to CVS or for groceries and a church-assembled "Blessing

Bag" which has a bottle of water, a pair of socks, other personal care items and a gift card for a meal.

Feeding Programs:

- As a congregation, we provide non-perishable food to particular families through **Shared Harvest**, a program we partner with other Lutheran congregations. We collect specific items and also collect dollars to buy those items.
- A second program we partner with for meals is **The Eddy House**, for which we provide a meal every Monday and which feeds the youth in their program.

Community Referrals:

- We are a supporter of **The Good Shepherd Clothes Closet (GSCC)** (Not affiliated with the church, just a similar name). They provide clothing for free to those in need.
- **Volunteers of America** is a program which also (like GSCC) serves homeless and low-income folks and is physically located on the Record Street campus. We at Good Shepherd have helped to host the shelter tent that VOA staffs. The VOA operates a variety of programs.

Of course, make your gift wherever you feel led, but if you've been particularly touched by seeing this man in need who was homeless and may have had addiction or mental health challenges, then I'd suggest the VOA.

A friend of mine is their development director and I made a gift there recently. Here's her contact info and the giving info she provided me. You could go to their website, check out their programs, and make a gift.

His follow up:

Good morning and blessed Monday and happy Memorial Day Pastor Scott. First and foremost, thank you for your well wishes.

As for your request, absolutely and I am so glad you feel my story from last week is worth sharing. I'm honored. However, I must say I was only doing what felt right by my heart, soul, and faith. I also know that the prevailing thought of "these people just need to get off the drugs and get back to work and stop being lazy" is shortsighted, and more often than not, very far from their truth and reality. Addiction, mental health, a failing emotional health system in our country, etc. leave a sad road of heartbreak and tragedy that is oftentimes, unavoidable.

I have looked into the VOA extensively these past few days trying to see exactly where I would fit in best trying to help, to give back. Their programs are so immense and wonderful in scope that I look forward to reaching out and being involved. Thank you so much for the recommendation.

Signed, Name

- By God's grace and in the power of the Holy Spirit, may we be ready to function as the body of Christ in the world when unexpected opportunities present themselves.

The Church is God's People Active in their Service in the World

Recorded on the Front Steps of the Church

Acts chapter 2, our primary reading for today, tells the story of the believers being gathered together in one place.

- The sound of a violent, rushing wind filled the entire house
- Tongues as of fire appeared among them
- People from all over the region, of different cultures and languages, all spoke in their own native language, and yet they understood each other.
- These signs were confusing: people were amazed, astonished, and perplexed, and they wondered, "What does this mean?"
- Some people laughed and sneered and figured people were just drunk.

Peter stands up. He is the one whom we previously remember as the one who claimed that he would stand by Jesus no matter what. Then Jesus told him "the cock will not crow this day, until you have denied three times that you know me." (See Luke 22:13-14).

And that is, of course, just what happened (Luke 22:60).

And when Peter denied Jesus and remember what Jesus had said, "he went out and wept bitterly" (Luke 22:62).

Peter, this one who denied Jesus, is now the one who stood up in this large group of people, raised his voice, and boldly interpreted what was happening using words of Scripture from the prophet Joel.

God's Spirit was being poured out on all God's people, young and old, men and women, slave and free.

God's power in the Holy Spirit, God's ongoing presence among them, was transforming them to be the Church in the world.

- *Here is the Church, Here is the Steeple. Open the Doors and See all the People.*

The building may be closed, the doors may be locked, but by God's grace and by God's Spirit at work in the Church, may we as God's empowered people continue to be open to new ways of being the Church, despite the physical restrictions. The Church is not prevented from praying, worshiping, caring for one another, and being God's people in the world. Thanks be to God. Amen.