

Neighbors in Christ Parish – July 2016 Newsletter

*Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." – Matthew 28:16-20*

Sisters and brothers in Christ,

I bring you greetings from the Southwestern Minnesota Synod Assembly that recently wrapped up at Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, MN. Over two days, I witnessed many successful and enlightening stories about what our sister Lutheran congregations are doing, and how they are embracing God's mission and are equipping God's people to go out into the world and proclaim the great things that are being done in Jesus' name. We heard descriptions of ministries that are deepening congregational vitality and ask the questions, "What is God up to in this place?" and "Why do we even exist?"

I raise these questions to you because we are each called by God to do something great in our own lives by promoting or proclaiming the gospel, as modeled in Matthew 28. As the Lord gave the 'Great Commission' to his disciples, so we are too commanded in bringing our faith in Christ to those in the communities we live and serve. Once we have established 'why' our congregations are here, we then can begin to find our clarity of purpose for what we as God's called people can do to inspire others to love and serve our fellow humanity, as God calls us to do. In recent weeks, there has been much division and disagreement in the world. Our society continues to point the finger at 'the other', or persons that are different than us; we should instead be asking questions and creating dialogue seeking unity in a time of chaos. We are called to love and serve our neighbor, rather than continue walking by and hoping someone else will take up a cause for justice.

Our shared humanity also shares a creates a bond which we were given by the Holy Spirit, coming from the refreshing and life giving waters of our unified baptism. We continue to live into the Kingdom of God as Neighbors in Christ by rejoicing and suffering when we see others in joy and in sorrow. Our shared mission is that of peace, love, and forgiveness as the gospel

teaches us. But there unfortunately continues to be those who want to divide and conquer using God's own inspired words for their personal, political, and societal gain. We must rise above that oppressive speech and remember that we are called to love and serve, just as Jesus continues to do for us.

We must continue to ask what God is indeed up to in the places we live and why we come together serving Christ in the first place. These questions must be what we ask of ourselves first. And then through the Holy Spirit, God will remind us of who we are and what our mission is. We are called to love and serve our neighbor, even if we disagree with who they are, what they look like, or who they love. God's command trumps ours.

Blessings,

The Rev. Erik R. Karlson