

**FIRST SERMON**

First Lutheran  
Aitkin, MN  
March 4, 2012

**John 20:19-23**

Rev. Darrell J. Pedersen

Back in the horse and buggy days, a man was working in his garden just outside of town. The road into town passed beside him. As he worked, another man came along and stopped to speak with him. The traveler said, **“Hello there. I am headed for the town up ahead. I’m looking for a new place to settle down and live. What’s your town like?”** The gardener thought about it for a minute and then responded, **“Well what’s the town you came from like?”** The traveler answered, **“Well, it wasn’t much of a town. The people there weren’t very friendly. They didn’t help each other out. They gossiped a lot. It wasn’t a very nice town. I’m glad to be gone from there.”** “I’m sorry,” responded the gardener, **“but I’m afraid that you’re going to find this town to be pretty much like that too.”** The traveler sadly shook his head and moved on through the town.

After a little while **another stranger** came along and stopped to talk to the gardener. **“Hello there. I am headed for the town up ahead. I’m looking for a new place to settle down and live. What’s your town like?”** “Well,” asked the gardener, **“what’s the town you came from like?”** The second traveler answered, **“Well, it was a wonderful town. The people were so friendly. Everybody helped out when somebody was in need. They were very supportive of one another. I’m sorry I had to move away.”** “Well,” said the gardener, **“I’m so glad to meet you. You’re going to find that our town is just like that too! Welcome to your new home!”**

Jennifer and I are leaving the Lord of Life faith community in Baxter and moving to join this faith community which gathers here at First Lutheran Church in Aitkin. As we came walking into Aitkin, there was a gardener, or maybe better someone shoveling snow, working alongside Main Street. And I said, **“Hello there. We are headed for First Lutheran Church up ahead. We’re looking for a new faith family to join for worship and life. What’s First Lutheran Church like?”** And that man asked, **“Well, what’s the faith community like where you came from?”**

And I answered, “They’re a **bunch of sinners!** On any given week in worship, every third one has some sort of **major crisis** going on in his/her life. They make **mistakes**. They sometimes **forget who created**, loves and cares for them. **BUT**, they’re, at the same time, a **bunch of saints** - **beloved, forgiven and precious** to God. **Jesus is their best friend.**

- They **worship** the Lord with joy.
- They **contribute generously** to the Lord’s work.
- They **support each other** with powerful acts of love and caring.
- They **welcome strangers**.
- They **feed the hungry**.
- They especially **look out for kids and families**.
- They try hard to **reach out and help folks not only in their own community, but even all over God’s world.**
- And they have **wonderful meals** all the time!

They have **Good News to share** and they do it with both **words and deeds**. God’s people at Lord of Life are a **wonderful family of faith**. We are **very sad** that we were **called away** from them. But, we are **very glad** that **they have sent us to help out in Aitkin.**”

And that gardener, or snow-shoveler said, “**Well, I’m so very glad to meet you. I think that you will find that First Lutheran is just like that too.**

Let me tell you - the folks at that church:

- Serve a community meal every week,
- Host a community food shelf,
- Have always done wonderful youth ministry,
- Make quilts for high school seniors and for families who struggle - here and overseas,
- Work together to care for folks when they lose loved ones,
- What a **miracle** – **retired folks** come and go every day doing ministry to share Jesus’ love in and out of the church,
- What a **great miracle** – the **children** help with worship and special projects,
- What an **even greater miracle** – folks in their **20s, 30s and 40s** faithfully teach Sunday School, Bible School, mentor confirmands, chaperone youth retreats and worship together! These are young people who could be doing a thousand different things in a thousand different places – but they choose to serve Jesus right here!

And that gardener/snow-shoveler said, “**First Lutheran is a wonderful gathering of God’s beloved and precious people. Welcome to your new faith home!**”

On the first Easter Sunday, the risen Jesus said, “**As the Father has sent me, so I send you.**” Jesus still says that today – “**As the Father has sent me, so I send you.**” Jennifer and I are being sent to Aitkin. And you have been sent here too.

When you come to know someone that could truly use Jesus’ love and care, what will you tell them? (Pause) When you see someone who needs to hear a word of forgiveness or acceptance from you, what will you say? (Pause) When you come to know someone who could truly use a good, strong faith family, what will you tell them? When a stranger shows up here, how will you welcome them?

This First Lutheran church family may be the best chance a whole lot of people have of experiencing the love of God. You may be the best chance that one person has of meeting Jesus. That’s God’s plan for us. Thanks for answering God’s call. Thanks be to God for making us family in Christ, together here, together with the folks in Baxter, and all over the world.

My mission here in these early days is to be a lover and a historian among you. I will work to love and care for this parish and community in every way that I can. And I will work to learn your history – where you’ve come from, what is important to you, what your hopes and dreams are. My wife **Jennifer and I look forward to living in God’s love with you. Thanks for being our new friends in Christ.**

Amen.