

SERMON

First Lutheran Church
Aitkin, MN
March 18, 2012

Psalm 139:1-18
John 1:43-51
Rev. Darrell J. Pedersen

“Jesus loves me this I know”

Dear Friends in Christ,

During the past few days I’ve started to highlight the names of First Lutheran’s kids and adults who are mentioned in articles printed in the Brainerd Dispatch or Aitkin Independent Age. We want to get a bulletin board going where everyone can celebrate how our folks are **making a difference in this community and world**. I think that some of First Lutheran’s kids were a part of Aitkin’s recent success in Dance, Wrestling, Basketball and Music. And surely there are lots of other kids who are working hard in studies, sports or the arts as well. I love to celebrate the good things that are happening in the lives of our kids and adults. At first it’s going to be kind of hard for me to do since I don’t know the names of very many of our kids or even adults yet. I’m not always sure who is who. I may sometimes underline the wrong child or maybe miss one or two altogether. **Jesus hasn’t ever missed a child**. Jesus **doesn’t miss children**. Jesus **won’t ever forget a child**. Jesus **won’t ever forget or give up on you**, me, your kids or mine.

For the past thirty-two years as a pastor and even before, I’ve wanted to introduce people to my friend Jesus. I look forward to sharing Jesus with you dear brothers and sisters in Christ too. Jesus is the one who has faithfully loved, cared for and carried me all of my days. **Psalm 139:1-18** has long been my favorite Psalm. In this beautiful word coming from 800 years before the time of Jesus, we are reminded that God **dreamt and loved us into existence**. We are reminded that God is **intimately present with us** every day of our lives. We are reminded that **even when we don’t want any part of God, God patiently waits, loves and cares for us anyway**.

God goes anywhere and everywhere to have us as God’s own precious children. The Psalm assures that God travels from the heights of joy to the pits of despair for us:

- God awaits us in **heaven** and God journeys to **hell** for and with us.
- From the **ecstasy of marital intimacy** to the **fear of divorce**.

- From the birth of our children to the fear of losing them.
- From the beauty of creation to the devastation of natural disaster.
- From the gift of our work to the loss of our job and home.
- From the love and support of human relationships to the loss of loved ones.
- From delighting in the presence of God to wanting nothing to do with God.

The Psalmist assures us that there is no where, no time that we can escape from God's presence. He says, "**Your eyes beheld my unformed substance. In your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them yet existed. How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! I try to count them—they are more than the sand; I come to the end—I am still with you.**" (Repeat) I've read this passage at a lot of death beds. I'd like it read at mine too please.

My parents and church family introduced me to Jesus. Mom told me that I was the **little lamb in Jesus' arms** shown in the painting above our altar at Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Alborn, Minnesota. Mom said we all are that little lamb. Our family almost never missed worship. I was baptized, brought to the Lord's Table, confirmed and included in fellowship and in service events. Our church family supported each other, maintained the building and reached out to invite, include and care for others.

I was raised to believe that **Jesus loves me and can be counted upon.** Jesus was there when I was flunking out of engineering and decided to try to become a pastor. Jesus was there when I married Jennifer McCorison 39 years ago and then again at times when we wondered if we'd be able to stay married. Jesus was there when each of our children was born, and when the doctor said "**You're little girl may die any minute.**" Jesus was there when we prayed about whether or not to take the risk to move to Baxter and try to start a new church. Jesus was there when **my plan** for a Quonset hut turned into the amazing facility that God gave for them to use, share and enjoy. **Jesus is here now when Jennifer and I are again taking a risk to launch into a new adventure in Aitkin, Minnesota.** Jesus will be there when I die and when I rise again to dine with my precious loved ones and all the other saints at the Lord's Table in heaven.

Jesus has been there at every baptism, wedding and funeral that I have performed. Jesus has been part of every confirmation retreat and every

sermon I've preached. If any good has come from it all, it has been **"Thanks be to God."** It has been Jesus there for me, through me, for all of us, and through all of us. In the years ahead, I don't want you to hear so much about me. I want you to **hear about Jesus.** I want you to **meet Jesus.** I want you to be **set free again and again to entrust your whole life and being safely into the hands of Jesus** – for now and for ever.

Jesus came into our world two thousand years ago and started gathering some folks to be a part of God's new kingdom of love and forgiveness (John 3:14-21.) Those first few men and women decided that they wanted to be a part of what Jesus was doing. They went and told some friends. They said, **"Come and see"** we have found the one we have been looking for (John 1:43-51.) People have been telling friends **"come and see Jesus"** ever since. That's what I want to be telling you my friends too. If you get even just a little glimpse of Jesus in what I have say or do, I will be so thankful and glad. I have already seen glimpses of Jesus in you **and I am so thankful and glad.**

Jennifer and I left the faith family at Lord of Life Lutheran in Baxter to come and join your faith family here in Aitkin. We are truly grieving our separation from our old faith family. But, we are trusting God to settle us safely into the midst of this First Lutheran faith family. We are trusting God to **continue to bring people into a life-giving relationship with Jesus in both places** and all over the world. **Wherever you are right now, Jesus is there to love and care for you, to give you life. Nobody has more to offer. Nobody could be a better friend and God.**

A world renowned scholar, **Carl Barth**, who studied the Bible his whole life and wrote dozens of books, was once asked by a reporter, **"What's the most important thing that you've learned in all of your studies?"** Carl Barth answered, **"Jesus loves me this I know."** I agree. In my life and in my work, this promise is what **GIVES ME HOPE AND KEEPS ME GOING EACH DAY:**

Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so.

Little ones to him belong, they are weak but he is strong.

Yes, Jesus loves me. Yes, Jesus loves me.

Yes, Jesus loves me. The Bible tells me so."

I learned this song when I was little. I still sing it. I hope it's your song too. Thanks be to God.

Thanks for being a part of the Body of Christ which gathers together at First Lutheran. I hope and pray that our faith and lives will be blessed as we walk together with Jesus and all of God's people in the years ahead. I know that that's what God intends. It is an honor to be your pastor. I thank God for you. Amen.