

SERMON
First Lutheran Church
Aitkin, Minnesota

John 15:9-17
Rev. Darrell J. Pedersen
May 13, 2012

Senior Recognition/Mothers' Day

CHILDREN'S MESSAGE

Kids, let me read a little story to you from "Where the Wild Things Are" by Maurice Sendak. (Read story.)

Well, you heard the story. Our little friend got into trouble by being bad around the house. He was sent to his room with no supper. Once in his room, his imagination ran wild and he traveled for a whole year to the land of imaginary monsters. They tried to scare and maybe even eat him, but he managed to get the best of them and even became their king. He was in charge of the monsters and they all had a wonderful time together. But, it didn't take very long before the boy became homesick and wanted to go back to his family. You heard it, when he got back his room was waiting and so was a nice warm supper. He was welcomed home.

Our world is a little like that story. We do get into trouble sometimes. We do want to be in charge and do whatever we want sometimes, even if it hurts other people. Our parents do get angry at us sometimes. We do get punished sometimes. We might even think that nobody loves us anymore. But, like in the story, our parents keep on loving us.

In the story, there were imaginary monsters out there. I used to be afraid that there were monsters under my bed. Did you ever think that? Well, there may not be monsters under our beds, but there are bad things and sometimes bad people out there in the world where we live. And we aren't able to control everything. Even our parents can't control everything and sometimes bad things happen. But, unlike in the story, God keeps on loving and caring for us. And God even goes with us to the bad places, and through the bad times of our lives. And God is always there to help us to come home, to start fresh, and to give us a loving meal when we wander off and try to take care of ourselves.

And when we get over being bad, or when we come home to be with God, we can love God back and share that meal with God. Welcome home kids

and parents and everyone. God loves you very much. And the monsters won't get you. Thanks be to God. Amen.

ADULT MESSAGE

It's graduation time. I took out my old high school yearbook this past week. As I looked through it, I reflected upon some of the people pictured there. This guy, here in the book, got out of school and pretty soon got himself into a lot of trouble. They told him either to join the army or to go to jail. It was during the Vietnam War. He went into the army. This guy was my best friend. He married my wife's sister. Things went badly and they got a divorce. Both since remarried. This gal got married and she and her husband bought my parent's home and still live there. This fellow used to drink and drive and it killed him. This guy went off to college to become a highly paid engineer. He flunked out of engineering and now I understand that he is a preacher somewhere in the woods of northern Minnesota. This guy is probably the most famous of my classmates. He played college football and then got drafted into the pros. I guess that he got cut before he ever got to play in a game though.

I wonder what's happening in the lives of my high school classmates today. I saw a few of them at our 40th class reunion last summer. So far as I know there are no governors, big business executives or movie stars among them. And even those who might be "big successes" may not know joy in their lives. What is there that is constant or dependable in your life? What do you count as most important? Where can you turn for help? Where do you find hope for the future?

Today is Senior Recognition Sunday and Mother's Day. It seems like the two go well together. How many folks here today are visiting from out of town? How many came to Aitkin because of Mother's Day? How many really came because its opening weekend of fishing season? Graduation is a time of wonderful hopes and dreams. Although, I well remember it hitting me about this time in my senior year, "**Whoa, in a couple of weeks, everything in my life will change.**"

Our young people are starting a new chapter in a pretty big and scary world. It is a place where jobs are scarce, advanced schooling is very

expensive and where monsters or at least troubles sometimes lurk along the way. There is a very nice billboard posted along highway #210 right near the Brainerd airport as you head east. It says, "**God loves you.**" The very next billboard you see says, "**Point Blank - permit to carry classes.**" If you reflect for a minute, it sounds like "**God loves you, but you'd better be packing a gun for self-defense.**"

This past week **Maurice Sendak** died. He was the author of a number of children's books including "**Where Wild Things Are.**" He is credited with going deeper than the sugar-coated wonderland that we often paint for our children. He described problems and monsters that appear in the lives of our children. What kind of a world awaits our seniors?

In our Gospel text for today, Jesus is giving final instruction to his little band of believers. He knows that this will be his last night with them before he is arrested and killed at the hands of an unjust and violent world. It is a world filled with foxholes, bank collapses, murders, prejudice and hatred. Jesus is no stranger to our world. What does he tell those worried disciples? "**Abide in my love.**" Set up your tent, make your home, look for hope in the faithful embrace of the One who loves you enough to die for you. They didn't know it then, but we have the advantage of looking back from the future. The **sacrificial love** of fully human and fully divine Jesus has the **staying power** to survive the dark night and to bring joy to welcome us home in the morning. Every human being has two choices. We can either face the world alone, or together with Jesus. Jesus invites us to live in the love and joy that he alone can give. Abide in Jesus' love - to sustain, bless and even empower us for **joyful, deep and rich living** no matter what the world throws at us.

Jayne and Bob Mlynar's son, Bret, is a North Dakota State Trooper. Early on, Bret experienced his first fatal crash involving the death of a family of four in a burned out van. When his mom learned that he had been responsible for helping to remove the bodies, she worriedly asked him, "**How did you do it?**" He responded by telling her that he found, in the burned out wreckage, a Bible, unburned. That, he told her, gave him the assurance that this family was in God's care.

Wait, if they were in God's care, why did they die in the crash? Death is one of the scary monsters in the world where we live. Death is one of the enemies that Jesus took on for us. Jesus' Easter resurrection brings to us the promise that even death - car accident, cancer, murder, suicide, war - even death can't take us away from the love of God which is ours through Christ Jesus our Lord. (John 3:16-17, Romans 8) Our Christian faith doesn't exempt us from the world's troubles. Rather it promises that Jesus walks with us in and through those troubles. And when we realize that Jesus is there for us, with us, even advocating for us - it makes all the difference in the world. All of a sudden and forever, the world becomes also the amazing, wonderful, and hopeful place that God originally willed it to be. The world in God's love becomes pure gift to be loved, cared for, enjoyed and shared.

The children's book, "**Where Wild Things Are**" tells the story of a little boy who perfectly reflects our human, self-centered nature. He misbehaves and when confronted by his misdeeds strikes out at the very people who love and care for him. Then he retreats into a fantasy where he confronts the world's monsters but has the power to subdue and rule them. Sooner or later, however, being the king of a monstrous world grows old and he longs for a **return to a place where someone bigger than him awaits with love and care**. When he returns from his dream/nightmare world - **a warm meal and safe resting place** await him.

It is graduation time. Today is Mother's Day. We all share in common a longing for, an appreciation of **love, life and joy**. My own kids grew up in a household where their dad was too often gone from home night after night. I almost always worked weekends. Church for my kids probably presented more challenge, stress and distress than peace and joy. In your own homes, lives are crazy busy, bills mount up, jobs are in jeopardy, relationships struggle. Sometimes monsters steal away love, life and joy. Sometimes radical or fundamentalist views of God leave us reasoning out that God must only be a dream/fantasy. By our very nature we turn and run from God, to face the world alone, to make our own way toward elusive dreams of success and prosperity.

On the night before he died, Jesus told those early believers, "**I have said**

these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. In the face of his own death, **Jesus spoke not just about survival but about joy!** He is setting the table for a life-giving relationship between God, us and each other. Jesus is offering the one thing that will surely outlast every monster or success that comes our way. He tells them, **“I have called you friends.”** Jesus said, **“You did not choose me, but I chose you.”** Remember standing in the kickball line at noon hour and hoping that you might not be chosen last? Two thousand years ago Jesus chose you. Before you were conceived, God had you in mind. God creates us - doesn't have to be seven days. God adopts us in baptism. And we are part of a long line of people who promptly run away from God to the land of monsters. But God has a long history of loving us still. When you graduate, where will you head? You may run away from God at 90 miles an hour, but it won't work. **God won't stop loving you, won't forget or give up on you. There will always be a home and a meal waiting for you to return to. Oh, and don't forget, Jesus travels with you.**

In Maurice Sendak's book, **“Where Wild Things Are,” “Max the king of all wild things was lonely and wanted to be where someone loved him best of all.”** So he went home. Maurice Sendak was raised as a Jew. He was troubled by the horrors of the Holocaust. He knew the monsters of the world, but he apparently never got to know Jesus. **“I want to be alone and work until the day my head hits the drawing table and I'm dead. Kaput,”** he said last fall. **“Everything is over. Everything that I called living is over. I'm very, very much alone. I don't believe in heaven or hell or any of those things. I feel very much like I want to be with my brother and sister again. They're nowhere. I know they're nowhere and they don't exist, but if nowhere means that's where they are, that's where I want to be.”**
(Brainerd Dispatch, Wednesday, May 9, 2012)

Dear young people, I confess that this sermon is not just for you seniors. I was hoping that your parents and the rest of us might hear it too. It may not occur to many of us right now, but, **our best, first, last and forever friend is Jesus.** Somewhere amongst the autographs in your yearbook it says, **“You are my friend. I will love you forever. Jesus.”** Amen.