

SERMON
 First Lutheran Church
 Aitkin, Minnesota

1 Corinthians 12:1-11
 Rev. Darrell J. Pedersen
 January 20, 2013

CHILDREN'S MESSAGE – "Whistle, Don't Crawl"

There is a story about a man who was out walking on a very cold winter day. He came to the edge of a river that was frozen over, just like many of our rivers are frozen over right now. He wanted to cross the river where there was no bridge. "**I wonder if this ice will hold me?**" he said. The man didn't know that the river was frozen solid all the way to the bottom.

For a long time he looked at the ice and thought it would hold him, but he wasn't sure. Then he said to himself, "**If I crawl over, it won't break so easily.**" So he crawled across the ice on his stomach. The **ice held him,** but he was **worried all the while.**

Once on the other side the man saw a big truck coming down to the river. Without stopping, the truck drove onto the ice and over the river. In the truck was a little boy riding along with his father. The boy never worried a bit that the ice would break. He was whistling a happy song all the while.

Which one was safer on the ice, the **happy little boy** or the **scared man?** They were both safe. But there was a great difference between them. The boy who trusted his father was **safe and happy.** The man who did not trust the ice was **safe but worried.**

Some Christians are like the boy, others are like the man. Some trust God to bring them **all the way through life and safely to heaven.** They are **happy with God and don't worry.** Others forget about God. They get to thinking that they are **all alone in the world.** So they crawl when they could ride and whistle.

Kids, you have Jesus, our Savior, with you every day. So trust him. Be happy. Don't worry. Don't crawl. You have parents and grandparents who take good care of you. You can trust Jesus even more to take good care of you. If we trust Jesus to take good care of us, our **lives will be joyful.** We will even be **able to share that joy with others** all of our lives and forever! That's what we are trying to do here. We are **trusting God together.** **And God is blessing us!** Thanks be to God.

ADULT MESSAGE – “Come Together for Our Future!”

This week I talked with two women, each over 90 years old, who have trusted God and worshiped faithfully all of their lives. I talked to a couple soon to celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary – trusting God all that time. I spoke with some folks who are facing life-threatening illness – trusting God. I talked with a young couple who are inviting God to be a part of their marriage and lives together. I listened as another young woman sought God’s help in letting go of a very painful childhood. She said, **“school was my refuge.”** Is **First Lutheran faith family a place of refuge** for some folks? There are kids who love to be here because they feel wanted and cared about. **Maybe you are a part of that love being shared?**

I sat in on the **Community Meal** board meeting. For **thirteen** years God’s people have been working together to provide here a good meal/fellowship opportunity for folks in this community to be blessed by. I have visited with folks who guide the **Community Food Shelf** that operates out of this building. They served **960** families in 2012, many who are members of this church. I visited with a **confirmation small group leader** who prays for the young kids who face so much wickedness in their everyday lives. He is an advocate for those who seem to have the toughest rows to hoe.

I taught an adult membership class this week. At the end of the class one of the folks who attended, a deaf person, said, **“I have never heard these things taught before. I have only been able to read them.”** God had provided a sign language interpreter.

If you believe that **Jesus is Lord** of your life and of your world, the Holy Spirit gave you that faith and dwells within you 24 x 7. That same Holy Spirit has brought us all together here in this place today. You wouldn’t be here if the Spirit didn’t bring you, even if it was your spouse who insisted...

The Apostle Paul says that there are **“varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit”** activates them all in every believer. Every person here is **welcome, wanted, needed.** Every person here has **hurts and needs, hopes and dreams** that other people here can **help with or bless.** Every one of us has been gifted by God with various **abilities, talents and passions.**

The Spirit is given by God to each believer **for the common good**. Our abilities, talents and passions are meant to **bless our lives**. They are also meant, by God, to **bless the lives of the people around us** and around the world. This **isn't an every-man-for-himself social club**. We are the **Body of Christ**, sisters and brothers of Jesus brought together for **mutual support** and **shared mission**. **Have you ever felt supported here?**

It is the beginning of a new year. It is the day of our annual congregational meeting. It is a good time for a pastor to give some sort of a "**state of the church**" message. Well here goes. First Lutheran faith family, here in Aitkin, Minnesota, is **alive and well**. The state of the church is **good**. God's faithful **Spirit has been hard at work** to bring about reconciliation, healing, and a renewed call to share the Good News of God's great love for all, for all people. The Holy Spirit has for 120 years been at work here.

Why is the state of this church good? It is because **TOGETHER God has been faithfully loving and caring for us** all along the way. It is because **TOGETHER the Spirit has been working to help us love and trust God back**. It is because **TOGETHER** we have been working to make sure that our kids and our world **trust that they don't need to cross the river by themselves**. **TOGETHER** we have been **talking and walking** the promise that **God is alive and well** here among us. We have **TOGETHER** been talking and walking the promise that **God is loving and trustworthy**. We have **TOGETHER** been striving to be the **hands and feet of Jesus** in very real ways in and through this place.

Years ago, the secretary from my former congregation received an email from a mom in our parish. It said, "**Tell Pastor Darrell that even though my sons complain about church, we must be doing something right. Sam was mad at me and was going to run away yesterday (he never got around to it). When I unpacked his suitcase I found his Third Grade Bible in there... little signs!**" This elementary school kid was ready to abandon mom and dad, but he was taking God with him. Or better yet, God was hanging onto him...

Do you see, adults or kids, we are **invited to ride across the river of life in God's truck**. God is there for us 24 x 7 –

- On the **sunny days** and in the midst of **life's worst storms**,
- In our times of **need** and in our times of **abundance**,
- In times of **our strength** and in **our times of weakness**,

- For us, our families, our neighbors, our fellow church members and even, Jesus says, for the enemy...

When our faith is strong, and even when our faith is weak, the Holy Spirit comes to embrace, fill, empower and enliven our thoughts, words and deeds... God keeps coming to give us life together in Christ.

Together here, this faith family, your faith family is crossing the river with Jesus. That gives me every hope. That makes me excited to see what God has in store for us in the year ahead. Today we come together for our future. And our future is riding with God. Thanks be to God.
Amen.