

SERMON  
First Lutheran Church  
Aitkin, Minnesota

John 20:19-31  
Rev. Darrell J. Pedersen  
April 7, 2013

### **CHILDREN'S MESSAGE**

Kids, do you see these Lincoln Logs? They belong to Don and Sonja Hagestuen. Do you think that they still play with them? I borrowed these to show you a picture of our church. What?

Please pick out **one piece each** and together we are going to build a church. We each have pieces now – some are the same as others, but we do have different kinds. Some are short. Others are long. Some are logs and some are boards. There are also some roof support pieces. Let's go ahead and build our church.

Oh, oh – we don't have enough pieces if we each can add only one. If we are going to be able to finish our church, we will need other people to come and help us.

When God created us, God gave each one of us special gifts, shapes, talents, and interests. No two people are exactly the same. When God uses us to build First Lutheran Church, not just the building, but the faith family, God wants each and all of us to share our own special gifts. Some of us are young, others old. Some of us are boys, others girls. Some of us can sing, others teach Sunday school. Some of us are really good at praying, others at listening. God means for every special part to be used in God's Church. We need everybody to help our church to be able to grow healthy, strong and wonderful.

Maybe when people come up for communion in a little while, each person will help us to add to our church building? What do you think? Should we ask all these other people to help us to build our church? Let's!

One last thing – Jesus is the **cornerstone** of our church. Jesus is the One part that holds us all together. If we build our church around Jesus, it will be a very good and strong church. Thanks everybody for helping to build this church. Amen.

That night Jesus left powerful gifts for them to use in changing the world – God’s peace, God’s Spirit and God’s mission. You know the story. Judas was dead at this point and Thomas, maybe the only brave one in the bunch, was outside somewhere. So when Thomas returned they told him that Jesus was alive again. You know his response. “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.” One week later, disciples still hiding behind closed doors, Jesus appeared amongst them again. Again, “Peace be with you.” Jesus sure wanted those early believers to be living in the peace of God. And he wanted Thomas to have what he needed in order to share in the peace that a risen Jesus offers. So Jesus showed Thomas his wounds, “Do not doubt but believe.” Thomas fires back, “My Lord and my God!” And Jesus answers “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.” And that’s where Jesus started talking to us – believers who haven’t seen... Faith has worked for centuries... First Lutheran Church is a faith place...

Why would non-believers ever bother to come to this place? Should we tell them to come so that they can save their souls? Get right with God? Earn salvation? Be good? Should we share more rules, oughts and shoulds, better morality? Is that what we have to offer? What about resurrection from the dead? What about healing for the brokenness in our lives? What about sustenance for daily living? What about God’s peace, love and joy? Does Jesus share acceptance and empowerment with God’s people? He sure did on that first Easter in their locked room.

Is being a follower of Jesus about “have to” or “want to?” Is being Christian about “obligation” or about “blessing?”

When you face what Paul calls our “last enemy,” death, what do you think will happen? Can you offer the pastor \$200,000 to guarantee your salvation? Would that be enough? “It might be worth a try...”

Dawn Peterson, 89, died this week. She had received the Lord’ Supper in her hospital bed a couple of weeks ago. Last Sunday she attended Easter worship at her nursing home. By Tuesday, she laid unconscious back in the hospital. Trusting that she could somehow hear, I shared Jesus’ Word of promise about forgiveness, resurrection and everlasting

In that same Dispatch edition, there is an article announcing the **ten most wanted criminals** in Crow Wing County. Perhaps Aitkin County has a similar list. Can you imagine what it would be like to be on that list? Can you imagine what it is like to sit in jail or prison or treatment center?

How many of us are right now **somehow imprisoned** by marriage struggles, grief, how to make ends meet, chemical dependency, childhood demons, health struggles, isolation, fear of tomorrow, tough home life...

**Can Jesus find us in such places?** Can Jesus set us free from such fears and struggles? Is there a taste of God's peace, grace and love waiting to embrace and free us? **Can God use you to free some other person?**

**Who is there to love and care for your own grandkids** in that distant city? Who is there to love and care for the grandkids of others who live here in Aitkin? I am praying for a young man who lives and works in Pakistan to be able to somehow taste and experience the love and care of God. I am praying that he will come to know the God who rose from the dead and gives me life here and now and forever.

There are **many times when we are not out looking for God**. But there is **never a time when God is not out looking for us**.

I have been spending some nights each week in a **vacant house here in Aitkin**. I moved in after the snow had fallen. All winter long the yard has been covered with deep snow. Just this past week, snow slowly melting, I got a glimpse of a beautiful stone pathway that heads off across the yard. I had no idea that this pathway was there. The sun's warm rays have revealed this new direction for me to explore.

When Risen Jesus visited those early Christians that first night, he was bringing the warmth, acceptance and compassion of God's peace with him. He **didn't just show them a path for life**. He came and found them in their locked room and invited them to **walk that path with him**. **To this very day, Jesus still shows up where we wait behind closed doors**. Jesus is ready to set us free... No door will stop him. Do you believe that? Those early disciples did. So did Dawn Peterson. So do I... Thanks be to God. Amen.