

SERMON
First Lutheran Church
Aitkin, Minnesota

John 21:1-19
Rev. Darrell J. Pedersen
April 14, 2013

CHILDREN'S MESSAGE

Kids, today our second graders are going to come up behind the altar and lead our whole congregation in praying the **Lord's Prayer**. Do you know the Lord's Prayer by heart? Our second graders do. They have been learning all about the Lord's Prayer in their Sunday school class.

Jesus' first disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray to God. He answered by teaching them to pray what we now call "**The Lord's Prayer**." Those first Christians watched Jesus pray to God all the time. They realized that it is **really important for us to talk to God**. That's what the Lord's Prayer is all about – us talking to God about our everyday lives.

The Lord's Prayer starts out with us saying, "**Our Father**." That's like calling God "**Daddy**." God loves us with all of God's heart. And God is like the best parent ever times ten million times. Just like good parents, God longs to be a part of our lives, to love and care for us every day. God promises to take good care of us forever! **The Lord's Prayer is all about our lives and our relationships with God and with each other.**

Today everyone in worship is receiving a nice little sheet with a whole bunch of prayers that we can all use back at home. We use these prayers at our Wednesday night supper here at church. They are meant to be meal time prayers, but they can also be used at bedtime, in the morning, or whenever. I hope that you and your family will take these prayers home with you today and **use them**.

I promise that if your family takes the time to pray together at home, God will hear those prayers and help your family to grow stronger, wiser and more in love with God and with each other. That's what God wants to see happen.

God lovingly listens, cares and answers our prayers. Thanks be to God. Amen.

ADULT MESSAGE

Our ELCA Bishop Mark Hanson tells about the time that he and his wife were the first passengers to climb on board for a plane trip.

I was wearing clerics (clergy shirt and cross) since I was on my way to preach. Someone must have forgotten to alert the crew that passengers were boarding because a flight attendant was sound asleep in my seat. I leaned over him and with a loud voice commanded, “**Arise from the dead.**”

He shot up out of the seat. He wasn’t sure if he was dreaming as the next words would be “**earth to earth, dust to dust.**”

Waking the flight attendant from a dead sleep led to interesting conversations. He talked about a recent change in vocation. Other flight attendants began to talk about sin and guilt and why they had left the church. It was clear they had not gotten the message that God is **not in the sin-accounting business.** They had not heard or believed that **Jesus brings them to life – a life of faith.** Two brought me slips of paper with sins for which they asked for forgiveness. (The Lutheran, Oct. 2012, “Always Being Made New,” page 50.)

The Bishop’s story reminds me of the days when I went door to door in Baxter inviting people to be a part of the start-up of Lord of Life Lutheran Church. Our ELCA guidelines for door to door calling prevented me from spending very long at each stop, and from going into the homes where people answered. There in January, during a real winter, amazing numbers of people stood in their doorway pouring out the story of their **lives and faith or lack of faith.** They saw a guy in a clergy collar and therefore they risked telling about how they had wandered away from God or from God’s church. Some hoped for **forgiveness and a fresh start.** Some went on to **help start and are still involved** at Lord of Life Lutheran Church.

Peter was likely hoping for some **forgiveness and a fresh start** too. You remember the story. Good old Peter, number one go-getter disciple had promised Jesus that he would die for Jesus if necessary. Jesus knew differently. Before long, when it really mattered, Peter **denied Jesus publically three times.**

Then Jesus died. Peter and the other disciples went into hiding - fearful for their own lives. Their original plan to follow Jesus was all shot to hell...

Now Jesus was back, alive and met them on the beach by their old fishing grounds. Jesus had risen, twice visited them in their locked room, but then disappeared again. Now what? What was going to happen? They went back to their former lives, fishermen. You know the story. They fished all night and caught nothing – professionals. As they approached shore, a stranger called out and encouraged them to cast their nets on the other side – ton of fish caught. **It must be Jesus!** They race to shore. Jesus has a campfire with fish frying. He invites them to bring some of **“their fish.”** They have breakfast together. This meal, served by Jesus, using some of the fish he had provided for them, is about as close to Holy Communion as you can get. Jesus provided everything, yet also invited them to share from what they had... It was a meal of forgiveness and of celebration joy.

Peter had had **three chances to LET JESUS DOWN.** Now Jesus gives Peter **three chances to EXPRESS HIS LOVE for Jesus.** **“Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?”** **“Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.”** Three times Jesus quiz’s Peter and the answer is always - **“Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.”** Jesus and Peter both know about Peter’s earlier failings. **Three times Jesus,** in response to Peter’s assurance that he loves Jesus, **gives Peter the chance to FOLLOW JESUS IN SERVICE – “Feed my lambs. Tend my sheep. Feed my sheep.”**

So far in Jesus’ resurrection story, Peter has been a big loser who blew his chance to follow Jesus. **Now after twice being visited by the risen Jesus,** Peter is still at a loss and goes back to his old world of fishing. **But Jesus isn’t done with him yet.** It is God who gradually or dramatically changes hearts, minds and actions in human lives. Jesus had risen, yet the world the disciples found themselves in remained pretty much the same – limping, wounded, seemingly abandoned by God. The world was the same, no fish, no Jesus, fearful folks

Then Jesus invited those early folks to share a meal with him. They had eaten at the Lord’s Table prior to his death. Now they ate at the Lord’s Table again. And the meal turned into a great celebration of the bounty of God for God’s people.

Do you see? When they did what Jesus challenged them to do, in their own fishing vocation, they witnessed the abundant nourishment that God longs to share with God's people. And once **fed, forgiven and renewed**, Jesus challenges them to **feed, forgive and renew** the world. **Their world was the same** as before Jesus died and rose. **But now, THEY were different**. They were followers, trusting in the risen Lord Jesus for life, salvation and all that really matters in this world. Jesus changed them. Jesus challenged them to join him in changing their world. Jesus visited them right where they lived and worked and played.

Have you gotten it figured out? Jesus, who gathered and meets us here today, does some of God's best work in the lives of people who don't always get it right. Jesus is able to take a motley crew of frightened men and turn them loose on the world with a **life-giving message** and **powerful deeds of service**.

Today we will be led in praying The Lord's Prayer by our second grade Sunday school students. They have been studying the Lord's Prayer in their class. Last Wednesday they and their parents met with me to look at the Lord's Prayer together. These parents are keeping a promise they made when they brought their little ones to be baptized as children of God. Being parents is a tough job carried out in a very difficult and sometimes frightening world. Our own **Gordon Prickett**, back in 1998, reflected upon the high calling it is to be Christian parents.

BOLD JOURNEY

So bold a journey these lovers take
 sworn to reach the end together
 they travel on – wife and husband
 collecting children and mortgages
 memories, dreams, and furniture.

Isn't it odd that God entrusted to them
 everything human He hoped would happen here.

Second grade parents, all young families, do you realize that your work as parents is Godly work? Do you realize that you serve Jesus when you love and care for your kids? Do you realize that you serve Jesus when you strive to build a home

and family where you believe and live like God is sitting with you at every meal? Do you realize that you are loving and serving God when you give yourself away to help make someone's life better at school, workplace, community or world? Do you realize that God still loves and cherishes you even when your best efforts fail and you feel hopeless in the face of that day's events?

Our love for God is reflected most clearly, not in our religious words, but in our **simple trust and attempts to walk with Jesus** in our everyday lives. It isn't our religious actions that answer Jesus' question, "**Do you love me more than these?**" It is our service to neighbor that says, "**Lord, you know that I love you.**" And Jesus does know... And hopefully, the **neighbor can see God's love in us** as well. Jesus **provides everything that we need, gives us everything that we have,** and then **invites us to share a little with him as he feeds and saves our world.**

It is God who gradually or dramatically changes hearts, lives and our world. God has been moving here among us at First Lutheran Church. God has been strengthening our resolve to follow Jesus in **loving and supporting each other.** God has been empowering us to **reach out and care for the folks** who live outside these doors – in Aitkin and in the world beyond.

Abundant nourishment is available for us at **Jesus' table** and in **Jesus' Word of promise.** Much of our world looks the same as when the early Christians were coming to see what it is to follow Jesus. When we eat at the table of the Lord, again and again, we are **strengthened for abundant living** in that world. When we eat at the table of the Lord, we are **strengthened to share abundant life with others.** When we do that, share Jesus' abundant life, **sheep get fed, little ones learn to pray, families are strengthened, call committees find faithful pastors** to serve among us and the **love of God awakens our world to new life in Christ.**

Summer's coming sooner or later. **Jesus has risen and plans to meet us** on the **beach,** in the **campground,** at our **kitchen table** and here in **worship.** Jesus is looking for you and for me. **Whenever we spend time with the Lord,** our lives and world change a little more... for the good... Thanks be to God. Amen.