

SERMON
 First Lutheran Church
 Aitkin, Minnesota

John 20:19-31
 Rev. Darrell J. Pedersen
 April 27, 2014

Jesus, risen Lord and Savior, visited his fearful disciples behind closed doors on the night of the first Easter and then again a week later. Three times in our text Jesus gave them this blessing, "**Peace be with you.**" This **peace of God** brings with it **healing for our broken relationships** with **God**, with **each other** and with the **whole creation**. The first day of the brand new Christian Church started in the assurance that **all is well between God and God's people**. Jesus brought them God's salvation. Salvation means wholeness/healing. Things were not and are not the way that God would like them to be in this world. God is changing that...

That's why Jesus started his resurrection visit by revealing the **wounds** in his hands, feet and side. Jesus/God suffered greatly, died, was buried and then rose again to bring this **peace of God** as a **pure and undeserved gift** for us and for the world. Did you catch that? **Salvation is not just that we go to heaven when we die**, as huge as that promise is. **Salvation starts right here, right now** – healing for our relationships with God, each other and the whole creation. We are talking about our relationship with the **animals and birds**, the **air and the water**, the **mountains and the fields**, the **factory and the school**, **your house and mine**. Heaven is just the **final stage** of God's saving work already begun in each of our lives.

The Apostle Paul puts it like this:

Romans 8:18-24a: "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the **creation** waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the **creation** was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the **creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay** and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the **whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now**; and **not only the creation, but we ourselves**, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, **groan inwardly while we wait for adoption**, the **redemption of our bodies**. For in hope we were **saved**."

God is not going to stop God's saving work simply by bringing you into a **life-giving relationship with God**. God continues to move through you to

create and grow life-giving relationships also between **you and the other people** in this world. And God is moving to create and grow life-giving relationships between **you and the physical world that sustains you**. God created us to be in **close and dependent relationship** with God, each other and the earth. We are **kin** to God, earth and neighbor.

Jesus' visit to that locked upper room included Jesus **giving the Holy Spirit** to his followers - that huddled, frightened, motley crew. The Spirit was given to **help us to be a part of patching up those broken relationships** – it starts with God's forgiveness of our sins – against God, against each other and against God's precious creation.

And Jesus didn't just leave them to sit on their hands in that little prison of fear. He said, "**As the Father has sent me, so I send you.**" As Jesus prayed, wept, lived, worked and died to rescue/patch up this broken world, so shall we, his followers. He didn't promise that it would be easy... In our short text, **six times** we hear that it all happens through **believing**. Only **faith in a faithful God** could do this huge and critical work.

Confident Christians remember that **true peace** comes not from wealth or safety. Real peace comes from **knowing that life is ultimately in God's hands**. It comes from **experiencing the joy of Christ's love and forgiveness** in our daily lives. Real peace comes from **facing all of life with humility and an assurance that God is in charge**.

Those scared, early disciples, and soon a multitude of other women and men, made their way out of that fearful place and began to blaze a trail out into their own first century world. The **trail was marked by their own faith and by their own life-giving words and deeds** done in Jesus' Name and for the sake of the people and world around them.

Karen Tibbetts, our sister in Christ whose funeral was held here yesterday, Karen left a trail of faith and of life-giving words and deeds. Dale and Karen learned together with their kids to trust God and to care about the people and world around them. Karen's greatest passion in life was to love and care for her family, and for many other people as well. She did a lot of that with a ready smile, listening ear and compassionate heart. Let me give **one little example of the legacy** that Karen has left behind. Karen made **cookies**, tons of cookies. She was known for bringing wonderful cookies to many, many occasions. The cookies were her way of

passing love along. On her last day, she was making a trip down to Rockford to do "**Grandma Duty**" for a granddaughter who needed to go to Rochester for tests. That day, Karen lost her life in a car accident on snowy, icy roads. When the tow truck driver came to haul away her demolished car, he found cookies and crumbs scattered all over the road. Karen was bringing root beer cookies to share with her grandchildren.

What a way to go. What a way to leave this world - **leaving a trail of cookies behind to mark the way**. **Karen left a trail of love and caring, a legacy of trusting** her life into God's keeping and then **good words and deeds** to care for the people and world around her. In the old fairy tale, **Hansel and Gretel** left bread crumbs to **show their way back home** as they faced the danger that awaited them. **Jesus** left some bread crumbs behind when he was in trouble too – **to show us the way home**. **"This is my body given for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sins."** Karen has been fed again and again by her Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. She was fed for life and for service, for worship and for joy. She was fed for eternal life with her Father in heaven. And she left a trail of love crumbs to mark her trail home to heaven forever.

Jesus, on that first Easter night, brought the **peace of God**, the **gift of the Holy Spirit** and an **invitation to follow him** in building a loving and caring relationship with God, with each other and with the whole creation. Each and all of those God-given relationships still need our best efforts to this very day. Today is our "**Creation Care Sunday**." When I was a kid, the headlines read:

- Cancer causing asbestos contaminates Lake Superior drinking water...
- Lake Erie is almost dead...
- Farmers' fertilizer chokes rural streams...
- City and Industrial waste causes rivers that burn...

Things are better today. Respect, love and care are still much needed. The whole creation waits with eager longing for God's saving work to be complete. You and I are a part of God's saving work in this world.

On Easter Sunday, here at First Lutheran, I watched as one of our faithful ushers knelt, at the conclusion to our sharing of communion, and carefully picked up every crumb of communion bread that had fallen here by the baptismal font. He treated that bread, the Body of Christ, with the

tremendous honor and dignity that it deserves. You and I treat Christ's wounded and resurrected body with that same kind of respect when we:

Care for our **relationship with God** by:

- Worshiping
- Praying
- Reading God's Word
- Living fully into God's peace and mission to save the whole world

Care for our **relationship with God's Creation** by:

- Conserving water
- Not wasting food
- Recycling anything we can
- Properly disposing of trash

Care for our **relationship with each other** by:

- Treating every person with the dignity and respect God gives them
- Sharing our abundance with those who lack adequate provision
- Advocating for those who are not receiving justice
- Listening and caring for those who are hurting

Karen Tibbetts left behind a trail of **cookie crumbs** – “I love you.” **Jesus** left behind a trail of **bread crumbs** – “**This is my body given for you.**” What legacy are you marking your trail with? I visited **Betty Lidfors** at **Aicota Nursing Home** just before Easter. She told me that she so appreciates receiving a hard copy of our bulletin each week. She feels badly when it doesn't arrive in the mail, because – **she uses it to pray for all of the people who are listed in our prayer concerns.** Betty is pretty much confined to her small room, but that doesn't stop her from doing creation care.

Jesus told those worried disciples, “**Peace be with you.**” Everything is good between you and God. Jesus gave them the **Holy Spirit** so that they could join God in loving and saving God's world. Then Jesus said, “**As the Father has sent me, so I send you.**” Creation Care Sunday, creation care lifetime – **God's Work, Our Hands.** Wow, what an honor we have been given and what a responsibility. God must love and trust us very much. God help us to love the earth and its people just like you do. Thanks be to God. Amen.

