

SERMON  
 First Lutheran Church  
 Aitkin, Minnesota  
 November 23, 2014

Matthew 25:31-46  
 Psalm 100  
 Rev. Darrell J. Pedersen

### **KIDS' MESSAGE**

Kids, what is this? Is it a church? Is it a bird feeder? Yes, it is shaped like a little church and yes, it is made to be a bird feeder.

Do any of you have bird feeders at your house, school or day care center? Why do people put up bird feeders? They do it to make sure that the birds have enough to eat in the cold, harsh winters that we have. Some people even feed birds in the summer time.

When we put out bird feeders, it blesses the little birds by giving them enough to eat. It also blesses us when we see the beautiful, little creatures flitting around outside our window. The birds are blessed and so are we.

Our church is something like a bird feeder. Do you think so? How? Here at our faith home, we get fed by God. Then we are able to help feed others. God puts out bird seed here at the church. What? How does God put out bird seed or help people here at First Lutheran? God:

- Always welcomes us when we come,
- Tells and shows us how much God loves us,
- Forgives us for bad things we do,
- Forgives us for not doing good things that we could,
- Gives us hope and help for facing the troubles/fears in our lives,
- Guides us in making decisions about how to live our lives,
- Helps us to love each other,
- Helps us to love others,
- Brings new friends for us to welcome,
- Shows us how to love God back by helping others.

My bird feeder has been empty all summer. I need to get some more seed and put out for the little birds to eat on these cold winter days. **Does God's bird feeder, the church, ever run out of God's good gifts to give to people?** No! **God will make sure that we have enough to keep sharing God's love and care with our world.** **Do you believe that? I do.**

Thanks be to God. Amen

## **ADULT MESSAGE**

God spoke to me Thursday, maybe twice. As I sat working on my funeral sermon for Friday, I was distracted by a flicker amongst the branches on the little tree outside my office window. God had given me some inspiration for my funeral sermon, so I was working to get the ideas that came to me down on paper. This was my second funeral sermon in the past week. Then I saw the little bird. It alighted on a branch that was bare except for the tiny red crab apples that hung from it.

What is a little bird supposed to eat this time of year? The flowers and the bugs are gone. The seeds and the worms are gone. The berries and the vegetables are gone. All of these are covered by frozen ground and deepening snows. Where will the little birds turn for refuge and for sustenance? Or will they abandon this place entirely?

Times are tough, but God has made provision for them still, even in November's early freeze and deep snows. There is the summer stash stored away for hard times. There are these tiny, dried up crab apples ready for the picking. And there are, here in town, a host of bird feeders kept filled for our little winged friends.

The birds of summer have long since flown off to the south. But, thanks be to God, our yards and forests are not devoid of feathered friends for us to enjoy and marvel at.

**What did I see outside my office window?** Was it just a little bird looking for food? No, I saw **sustenance provided by God**. And it reminded me, once again, of God's provision for our church and for the world that surrounds us.

The church does its best work:

- not when all is well,
- not when the checkbook is in the black,
- not when people have no problems,
- not when there is no conflict,
- not when there is no sickness or dying...

The church is **often at its best** in the **midst of hard times, struggle, persecution and doubt**.

In this place, you've heard me say it several times; **every third person** is likely struggling with some major battle in their lives. **Visitors** who come here, unless they just moved to town and were totally active in the church where they came from, these visitors have had some major trauma or blessing in their life in the last six months. And **once someone joins** this church:

- unless they have **twelve new friends** in the first year, they will soon be gone,
- and unless they get **involved in some mission/ministry** beyond just attending worship, they will soon be gone.

This is **not a rest home** for people with lives that are all together and in good order. This is a **hospital** for people who are sinners in need of God's love and care every day and forever. This is a feeding station for the kind of faith that not only shows up, but even carries us, when things are not going well in our worlds.

It seemed to me, this past Thursday that our **faith is all about counting upon God's provision**. I prayed that God would give me two funeral sermons and a Sunday sermon. God had me going on the second funeral sermon when the little bird alighted by the apples. It hit me right then. **There is God's Word for my Sunday sermon!**

It seemed appropriate for me to take a photo of these little examples of God's faithful provision with the "**First Lutheran Church Welcomes You!**" sign in the background. Is this big building, home for our faith family, not also a place where God makes provision for "**All God's Critters?**"

It is a cold world out there. There are folks who could use a warm coat or a warm place to sit and rest. There are **lonely people** who could use some friends and family to look out for them. There are **hungry people** who could use some food or some love. There are **hopeless people** who don't know that there is someone much bigger who cares and can help them.

Sometimes you may desperately need to be **eating** at the feeder of God's love, care and provision. Sometimes you may have **seeds/feed to share** with others. Sometimes you may know of a friend or neighbor who could use a **warm embrace and an invitation** to come with you to the feeder. Sometimes you may have the opportunity to **welcome a stranger** here.

In our Gospel lesson from **Matthew 25**, Jesus gives us a perfectly clear vision of **what God is doing in this world**. You heard it – **hungry** folks fed, **naked** folks clothed, **thirsty** folks given water, **prisoners** visited, **strangers** welcomed. In our text, some of the folks lived this way and some didn't. Neither group realized the importance of caring for other folks.

Some **didn't do these things** and were **unaware of their failure**. Others **did these things** and were **unaware of their success**. Some **took care of themselves only** – that's what the world teaches. Some **took care of others** – that's what Jesus teaches. Love and care didn't save the ones who helped others. No, the reverse is true. **The people who loved and cared for others had already been saved**. They had already been brought into a **life-giving relationship with God**. Jesus refers to them as the "**righteous**." Righteous people are simply folks who are living in a love/trust relationship with God. **And God's loving/trusting people simply live loving/caring lives**. **If you don't trust God to love and take care of you, then you don't have anything to spare for anyone else**. You need to hang onto your stuff so that you don't run out. You have to take care of yourself.

Jesus doesn't want anyone going to hell. Jesus longs for people **to love and trust God**. Jesus longs for God's children **to love and care for each other**. That's just simply what God's faithful people do - love and care...

Jesus spoke to me Thursday, maybe twice. He spoke the first time to give me a **Word of comfort for a family** who was saying "**Goodbye for now**" to a loved one – **death is not the last word for God's people**. Then Jesus spoke again to give me a **Word of empowerment for a faith family** that is trying to be the Body of Christ in Aitkin, Minnesota - "**You have a Word of hope for this community and world - Jesus**." **You have a Word of hope for this community and world – Jesus!**

Is that **First Lutheran**? Is that **your church**? Is that **your mission**? Is this **where you choose to come to be fed**? Is this **where you choose to make a Godly, life-giving difference** in this world? That's what **God** is doing here – **giving life** - and you may not know it, but **you** are a part of it. **Thank you** and way more, **thanks be to God**. Amen.

