

SERMON
 First Lutheran Church
 Aitkin, Minnesota

Philippians 2:1-13
 Rev. Darrell J. Pedersen
 September 28, 2014

CHILDREN'S MESSAGE

Kids, have you ever heard of someone being lost in a cave? Sometimes, if someone gets lost and friends try to find them, they will use a light and a long rope or string to go into the cave. One end of the string is held by someone outside the cave and the other is tied to the person going into the cave. That way, if the person inside gets mixed up about how to get out, they can follow the string back to the entrance. Then they can confidently go way into the cave in order to find their lost friend.

In our lesson from Paul's letter to the Philippians today, he tells about how Jesus has come into our sometimes very dark world in order to save us. We get lost whenever we get separated from God. So, God sends Jesus, God's own Son, to come into our world. The whole time that Jesus is looking for us, he stays connected to God in heaven. When Jesus finds us, each time, he makes sure to help us to find our way back to God. The string that we hang onto is faith in Jesus. Sometimes we forget to hang onto faith in Jesus, but Jesus stills hangs onto us. Again and again in our lives, when we wander off and get lost, Jesus keeps working to bring us safely back to God. Jesus does that for you, for me, for your whole family and for this whole faith family. Welcome home! Thanks be to God. Amen.

ADULT MESSAGE

There is a story called "The Grain of Rice." It goes like this.

Once there was a king who ruled wisely and who ruled well. He was loved by all the people of his kingdom. One day the king called his four daughters together and told them that he was leaving on a long journey. "I wish to learn about God. I will spend a long time in prayer. In my absence I will leave the four of you in charge."

"Oh, father," they cried, "don't leave us. We will never be able to rule the kingdom without you."

The king smiled. "You will do well in my absence. Now, before I leave I wish to give each of you a gift. It is my prayer that this gift will help you learn the meaning of rule." The king placed a single grain of rice in each daughter's palm. Then he left.

The oldest daughter immediately went to her room. She tied a long golden thread around the grain of rice and placed it in a beautiful crystal box. Every day she picked up the box and looked at it.

The second daughter also went to her room, where she placed the grain of rice in a wooden box and put it in a safe spot, under her bed.

The third daughter, a very pragmatic young woman, looked at the grain of rice and thought, "**This grain of rice is no different from any other grain of rice.**" She simply threw the grain of rice away.

The youngest daughter took the grain of rice to her room and wondered about the significance of the gift. She wondered for a week, then a month. When nearly a year had passed, she understood the meaning of the gift.

Months turned into years, and the four daughters ruled in the absence of their father. Then, one day, the king returned. His beard was full and his eyes sparkled with illumination gained through years of prayer. The king greeted each of his daughters, and then asked to see the gifts he had left them.

The oldest daughter rushed to her room and brought the crystal box. "Father," she began, "**I carefully tied a golden thread around the grain of rice and have kept it near my bed where I have looked at it every day since you left.**"

Bowing, the king accepted the box and said, "**Thank you.**"

Next, the second daughter presented her father with a grain of rice. "**All these years I have kept the rice secure under my bed,**" she said. "**Here it is.**"

Again the father bowed, accepted the box, and said, "**Thank you.**"

The third daughter rushed to the kitchen, found a grain of rice, ran back and said, "**Father, here is a grain of rice.**"

Smiling, the king accepted the grain of rice and said, "**Thank you.**"

Finally the youngest daughter stepped before her father and spoke. **"I do not have the grain of rice that you gave me,"** she said.

"Whatever did you do with it?" the king inquired.

"Father, I thought about that grain of rice for nearly a year before I discovered the meaning of the gift. I realized that the grain of rice was a seed, so I planted it in the ground. Soon it grew, and from it I harvested other seeds. I then planted all of those seeds, and again I harvested the crop. Father, I have continued to do this. Come, look at the results."

The king followed his daughter to the window where he looked out at an enormous crop of rice stretching as far as the eye could see. There was enough rice to feed their entire small nation. Stepping before his daughter, the king took off his golden crown and placed it on her head. **"You have learned the meaning of rule,"** he said softly. From that day the youngest daughter ruled the kingdom. She ruled long, and she ruled wisely, and she ruled well. ("Stories for Telling," William R. White, Augsburg Publishing House, 1986.)

In our story, the youngest daughter **learned the heart and mind of her father**, the king. And that is how she proceeded to live out her life. In his letter to the early **Christians at Philippi**, the Apostle Paul invited them to have **"the same love, being in full accord and of one mind"** with Christ. What does that mean? Paul said, **"Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others."** Then he said again, **"Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus."**

Do you have the mind of Christ in you? What does that mean? Paul used a hymn to tell the story of God's pursuit of humanity, of you and me.

"Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness." There it is. The creator of all that is, Lord of all creation, came down low and became human like us.

The hymn goes on. **“And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross.”** There it is. The creator of all that is not only came so low as to become a human, but he dove further, into the depths, by choosing to die for us. **How low?** God plunged into the pit of death by way of a torturous human cross. Jesus died at the hands of the very people he came to save.

To embrace and forgive us, to love and care for us, **Jesus gave himself away.** Jesus came to bring each and all of us into a **life-giving relationship** with God. Jesus died a wicked death to do that.

Then what happened? God lifted Jesus from the depths of death to the pinnacle of life everlasting. The hymn concludes. **“Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of the Father.”**

Jesus Christ is Lord of everything, rules the entire world, even the demonic forces will bow down to Jesus – **already, but not yet...** Our salvation, our life-giving relationship with God is already in place. But, God in Christ, God in you and me, is **still at work bringing God’s kingdom of love** into the everyday of our world right now. Jesus has won victory over sin, death and the power of evil, but God’s work is not yet done.

Paul concludes his counsel to the Christians in Philippi. **“Therefore, my beloved... work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”**

- **“Work out your own salvation?”** - Wait, Paul is the one who constantly beats the drum that we are saved only by the **grace**, the free gift of God. We can’t save ourselves. Right, this admonition is addressed to the whole faith community and is encouraging them to together **live into the salvation drama** that God is writing for them. **Let the Good News of Jesus embrace and carry you forward together!**
- **“Fear and trembling?”** – This is not fear of God destroying us. It is the assurance that we have been **invited into a love/trust relationship** with almighty and awesome God. Almighty God has **chosen to include us in God’s saving plan and work!**

- **“For it is God who is at work within you?”** We are not First Lutheran faith family alone here in this place. We are the people of **God’s mighty army** filled with God’s Holy Spirit! We are God’s **army of love in the face of ISIS**. We are **God’s army of healing in the face of Ebola**. We are **God’s army of compassion in the face of homelessness**. We are **God’s army of hope in the face of a hopeless world**.
- It is God who is **“enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”** If we do any good as sisters and brothers of Jesus here at First Lutheran, it is God’s work. If we do any good in this community, it is God’s work. If we make even the tiniest difference in that big world out there – God!

Paul says that we are **coworkers with Jesus**. Do you believe that? Do you have the **mind of Christ**? What does the mind of Christ in us **look like**? It looks like **these friends in Christ** who are **making a Godly difference** within the walls of this building. See their pictures. They are folding **newsletters**, **making quilts**, serving in the **office**, **polishing up the sanctuary**, cooking the **meals**, working at **creation care**, **studying** God’s will for our church and lives. Some of God’s coworkers staffed the **food shelf** here where **14 new families** came in this month, where **3** of the families were **homeless**, where **180+ families** were served in September... These are the **photos that I was able to snap around the church building** the past couple of days.

I was, however, **unable to get out in the community** and snap photos of the people with the **heart and mind of Christ** who are making a **Godly difference** as **teachers** at Rippleside Elementary School, as **officers** at the county jail and courthouse, as **tow truck drivers**, as **nurses** at Riverwood, as **bartenders and wait staff** at the Forty Club. I didn’t get any pictures of the **grandma** who is raising her grandkids, or of the guy running the **septic pumping truck** or of the gal who is working with the **Affordable Care Act to get folks insured...**

Whether you are doing something **here at church**, or **out there living your everyday life** – it is **God who is at work in you**. **Wow**, God is at work in you. God is at work in you. **Remember that and give thanks**. Thanks be to God.

The king gave his daughters a grain of rice. One realized that the rice was a seed meant to bless her and to bless the world around her. God does that with seeds of faith. May this seed of rice be a reminder to you – blessed to be a blessing. Child of God – mind of Christ. Amen.