

SERMON
First Lutheran Church
Aitkin, Minnesota

Psalm 86:1-17
Rev. Darrell J. Pedersen
February 28, 2016

KIDS' MESSAGE

Kids, do you know how to say, "**Thank you?**" Let's hear you say "thank you." When do we say thank you? Whenever someone gives us something, does something nice, says something nice about us, or helps us. Do you ever thank your parents for being good parents? Has anyone ever thanked you for being nice or kind, or helpful?

In our Gospel lesson for today, Jesus tells a story about how a person rented his farm to some people. When you rent something, it means that you get to use it, but you don't own it. It means that you give the owner some rent money for letting you use it. These people rented a farm, grew some good food and then when the owner sent workers to collect the rent money, the renters beat them up and sent them away. Finally the man decided to send his own son to collect the rent and the renters killed his son. Wow, if you were the land owner, how would you feel about the people who killed your son? You would probably hate them and wish that they would be punished.

Jesus told this story to help us to learn something about the world. God made everything in the world. God owns everything in the world. God lets us use God's world. God hopes that we might thank God for giving us our lives and this beautiful world to live in.

But, all through history, people keep forgetting that everything and everyone in this world belongs to God. God asks that we love and trust God to take good care of us. God asks that we love and try to take good care of each other. But, we keep forgetting God. People get hurt. The world gets messed up. Finally, God sent God's Son, Jesus, to love and care for us and we killed him! Wow, if you were God and you sent your Son to love and care for people, and we killed him, how would you feel?

But God is different than us. God was sorry, very sorry for what we did. But, God said, "I still love you. I forgive you. Let's start again. I will come and **live in your hearts and help you** to love me, your neighbor and the world." Today, Jesus is living in you, your parents, all of us – loving and caring for us, helping us to love and care for each other. And we keep trying to say thank you to God. Join me. "**Thanks be to God.**" Amen.

ADULT MESSAGE

Today we are once again lifting up the notion of **vocation** . In the first part of **Psalm 86: 1-7**, we hear the Psalmist speak of his **own troubled condition** – **“I am poor and needy.”** He goes on to **call for God’s help** in his time of need. Then he declares that **God is faithful** and **will help** him. **“God is good.”** The Psalmist is poor and needy and God is good.

In the second section of **Psalm 86:8-13**, the Psalmist again asks for God’s help as he tries to:

1. **Walk in God’s truth.**
2. **Devote his undivided heart to God.**
3. **Thank and glorify God forever.**

So, **God has helped and will help** the Psalmist. In this passage we hear that **God also loves** the Psalmist. This is **“steadfast love.”** This steadfast love means that God:

1. **Keeps God’s promises.**
2. **Proves faithful.**
3. **Establishes justice.**
4. **Defends the vulnerable.**

These are the understandings of God that God’s people have carried forward from the earliest Old Testament writings. The Psalmist knows that **God is good and faithful and helps him.** But the Psalmist also knows he **can’t even respond to God appropriately without God’s help.** He realizes he even needs God’s help to say **“Thank you” to God.**

God basically says to us, **“Here, I am going to let you use this life and this world. But I want you to use it well. And I want you to remember where it came from, who gave it to you. Trust me to love and to take care of you and then live thankfully by loving and caring for the neighbor and creation.”**

God loves and cares for us every day. God gives us every good thing we need for life. God even gives us life and salvation undeserved. The only thing left undone by God is for us to live all of our days thankfully to God. And God even helps us with that. And when we don’t, God loves us still.

My work as a pastor is always inadequate. The same would be true for my work as a husband, father and friend. **I am never able to do all that**

needs to be done. I let God, myself and other people down on a regular basis. **Yet, somehow, our amazing God still loves and cares for me. I am poor and needy,** yet, somehow, our amazing God is **still able to use me** and the gifts that God has planted in my life **to do at least a little good** in my life, my family, my work, with my neighbor and this world. And God is able even to bring me to a place of thanksgiving, joy, faith, hope and love. **I am poor and needy. God is good, loving and faithful.** There is the truth for me, you and all people. And God says that we are God's precious and beloved children. God's hands and feet in this world. Instruments of God's loving purpose. Just the way that we are. Wow.

I will stand before roughly 40 senior residents at Aicota Nursing Home this afternoon. It is First Lutheran's turn to lead the weekly interdenominational worship service there. Those **older brothers and sisters in Christ are "the Church,"** the "**Body of Christ.**" They pack that chapel every week to share together in God's Word. Those folks have been through about everything that the world/evil can throw at a person. And, they still believe God has been there for them and will be in the future and forever.

They are **praying for a host of people** – kids, grandkids, and people from their own congregations, our country, and the world. They are "the Church," whether they are in the chapel or not. **They don't need me,** an ordained clergy, to enable them to be the Church. God's spirit makes them the Church, including all of the various and beautiful expressions provided by their various denominations and individual lives. They are claiming and claimed by one Lord, one faith, one baptism.

A few weeks ago a couple of dozen youth and mentors attended our Synod's annual **Middle School Youth Gathering.** They were the Body of Christ together with hundreds of other youth from Northeastern Minnesota. Next week some of our older youth and their mentors will be attending the **Synod's Cardia Deo Senior High Youth Retreat** in McGregor. They will be the Body of Christ there. Our kids, with lots of life ahead of them, are parts of the Body of Christ. So are all the people from the various denominations who staff homeless shelters, serve in soup kitchens, staff food shelves, work at counseling centers, treatment centers, nursing homes, hospitals, clinics, dentist offices, adoption agencies and relief organizations that are scattered widely throughout our world.

They are the Body of Christ, the hands and feet of Jesus at work in a broken and needy world. They are channels of God's love, mercy, compassion and healing power.

The church comes to the place you live, work, study and play also. It comes in you. As a Christian, a child of God, you too have been gifted with God's Holy Spirit who enables you to use your God-given talents, joys and passions to share hope and life with those around you and with the world beyond.

Sharing hope and life for you may be as a **nurse** gently helping to deliver a baby. It may be as a **receptionist** treating a patient with patience and good humor. It may be as an **ambulance driver** risking your own life to ensure the safe arrival of the person you have raced to help. It may be as a **grand-parent** praying for your single parent grandchild. It may be as a **counselor** loving the troubled child in your care. It may be as the **employer** giving that disappointing employee a second chance. It may be as the **coworker** encouraging instead of criticizing your work mate. It may be as the **hospice provider** who can still be hopeful despite having to face end of life issues every day.

If we get to thinking that the Church is really about the "**religious professionals**," doing their "**mission**" within the walls of the church building, we are selling God short. If we get to thinking that there's nothing "**I**" can do to love the neighbor and to care for the creation, we are selling God, the neighbor and ourselves short as well.

Almost 500 years ago, most Christians lived in dread of a far distant God whom they thought was eager to send them to hell and who cared little about their everyday lives. They struggled with fears not unlike our own – plagues, warfare, loss of work, hunger, violence. Somehow the church had forgotten that **God is for us, not against us**, that **Jesus came to save us, not to condemn us**. The laity had the idea that the "clergy" were probably secure in salvation, but they were very uncertain about their own well-being and salvation.

When Martin Luther finally rediscovered in scripture a gracious, loving and compassionate God, he was **moved from near total despair to boundless joy and confidence in that God**. One of his many responses, to the God who died and rose again for him and for all of us, was the

writing of Luther's now famous hymn, "**A Mighty Fortress is Our God.**" The closing line of that hymn speaks of a faithful, dependable God who will not let us go. "**God's Word forever shall abide, no thanks to foes who fear it, for God himself fights by our side with weapons of the Spirit. If they take our house, goods, fame, child or spouse, wrench our life away, they cannot win the day, The Kingdom's ours forever.**"

The Apostle Paul put it this way, "**No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.**" (Romans 8:37-39)

You are a part of "the Church" – the Body of Christ – take that assurance with you to your home, your family, your job, and wherever life brings you. Then live with **confidence, thanksgiving and joy**. God is faithful and will **always be moving to give you abundant life**. God is faithful and will always be **moving to give abundant life to the neighbor and the world through you**. Thanks be to God.

It is our **vocation to love, thank, praise and serve God** wherever we go, whatever we do. **And God will help us**. Thanks be to God. Amen.