

SERMON
First Lutheran Church
Aitkin, Minnesota
September 10, 2017

Genesis 1:1-2:4a
John 1:1-5
Rev. Darrell J. Pedersen

My daughter, **Leah**, evacuated coastal **Charleston, South Carolina**. She went to inland **Greenville, S. C.** to stay with her sister and brother in law. Leah's husband, **Julian**, a professional firefighter, stayed in Charleston to help protect the people of the city. When the **hurricane** approaches, when the **forest fire** threatens, when **cancer** attacks, when you **have to escape**, what do you **take with you**? What is important enough to **carry along** for your future? **Where do you turn**?

In today's reading from the most ancient part of the Bible, **Genesis**, we hear about God's creation work. God lays out God's amazing plan to give life and blessing to humans through a love-trust relationship with God. Everything is so beautiful. Think of the **most beautiful place** where you like to spend time. That place is God's gift to you. Think of **the wonderful people** who contribute to your quality of life. Those people are God's gift to you.

In the first two chapters of Genesis, through two quite different creation stories, we learn of **God's amazing plan to give life and blessing** to you, me and to all people. God's creative work may have happened in seven days or in millions of years. **It may still be going on.**

Did you see the article in **USA TODAY**? "**Even in despair, family feels blessed.**" In Houston, Texas, **Helen Benjamin**, 78, woke up in a crowded motel room fifteen miles away from her flooded home. It was last Sunday so she immediately started getting dressed for church. For the past several days, she and her family have been dragging wet, moldy furniture and belongings out of her home. "**But we are blessed,**" she said. "**A lot of people are worse off.**" As she went out the motel door last Sunday she said, "**But in all that's going on, the first stop belongs to God.**" What do you say when trouble strikes? What is **your first stop**? When trouble strikes, you often hear people say, "**Well the fire took our house and all of our belongings, but at least we have each other. You can rebuild houses. You**

can replace stuff. Many people are probably going to try to **rebuild alone.** **God wants to help.** **Helen Benjamin** knows that.

God gave each of us the **amazing gift of our own lives** - life in this world. And God has given us an **amazing creation** to enjoy, care for and share. And God has given us **deeper, richer, abundant life in relationship with God**, each other and the creation. We are **God's children**. That is the most amazing of all gifts. And **what do you do with an amazing treasure?** You use it joyfully, liberally...

The woman in Texas, **Helen Benjamin**, is looking at nearly total disaster. Yet, she, in the midst of trying to start over, says, **"the first stop belongs to God."** She was headed for worship. You are here in worship today too. **What abundance do you know in your life?** **What struggles?** What are your **greatest treasures?** What would be the last things you would let go of? How are you **caring for/celebrating your treasures**, your family, yourself? Where do you go in good times or in bad? Today you are in worship.

Did you see the **August 16, 2017 Brainerd Dispatch** front page? It was a huge blank page with the words, **"IMAGINE A DAY WITHOUT LOCAL NEWS."** The **Aitkin Age** ran a similar front page. I read the local papers regularly, and appreciate them very much, but I could live without them. **Imagine a day without God.** What if God had never created you? Your family? This world? The whole creation? What if God didn't create you? **But God did.** What if you had to face the storms of this world alone? **You don't.** **You don't.** **You don't.**

First Lutheran is 125 years old. (Show first confirmation photo.) This congregation has been through lots of ups and downs, lots of good and bad. This **1899 confirmation class** would live to see the first airplane, the first automobile, the I World War, the Great Depression, the II World War and maybe a cure for polio. Somehow they **kept the faith that God is God** and **can be trusted to see God's people safely forward into the future.** One hundred and twenty five years ago, First Lutheran got its start. But, today, (Show second confirmation photo.) First Lutheran is **starting anew once more.** God is launching a renewed mission amongst us again today. What will these young adults experience in their own lifetimes? What will God be doing here in the next 125 hours, 125 months, 125

years? In the next month, confirmation classes, Sunday school classes, Tiny Tots, Adult Bible Studies, Milestones, Circles, Food shelf, Community Meal, Adult Membership Class, Bone Builders, Soup Kitchen **will all be renewing our mission to love and serve people...** **People are stepping up** to teach, mentor, provide childcare, prepare food, lead worship, visit the sick... With everything you've got going in your own life, you decided to come here today. You are an important part of God's family here at First Lutheran.

We live in a limping world, filled with doubts and fears. Too many people are trying to go it alone without God's love, compassion, forgiveness, healing and power for living each day. **Still, faith, hope and love help God's people to walk hand in hand with Jesus** – for our own well-being and for the salvation of the whole world. **God is the place for us to start every day.** When we are beginning a new school year, marriage year or new home. When we are beginning parenting, employment or retirement. **Today is a fresh start for every one of us.**

God is our source, our **life**, our **future hope**. God is always moving to gift us and all of humanity with **abundant, joy-filled life**. At the creation millions of years ago. In the birth of Jesus 2,000 years ago. In the wholeness and healing of God's love **yesterday, today and tomorrow**. Right now God is moving to **save, heal and make new**:

- **Our world** – amidst climate change, war, starvation...
- Our **nation** – amidst divisions, hatred and prejudice...
- Our **community** – amidst poverty, violence, drug addiction, despair...
- Our **family** – amidst relationships that sometimes struggle and lives that sometimes hurt...
- **In Our own lives** - God is helping us to once again be trusting in God. And **when we trust in God**, we can be **hopeful, courageous, wise** and **strong**...

When the hurricane approaches, when the forest fire threatens, when cancer comes, when you have to escape, what do you carry with you? Better, **who is carrying you?** **God is. God is. God is.** We can try to do everything ourselves. **Or**, we can, one day at a time, each and every day, all of our lives and forever, **start out with God**. Today, **we are starting out with God**. Thanks be to God. Amen.

