

SERMON  
First Lutheran Church  
Aitkin, Minnesota

Exodus 14: 5-7, 10-14, 21-29  
Rev. Darrell J. Pedersen  
September 30, 2018

**KIDS' MESSAGE** (Project photo of plant growing in sidewalk.)

Kids, do any of you have a favorite blanket that you took to bed with you when you were little, maybe still use? What's special about that blanket? Maybe your mom or dad gave it to you, maybe grandma. Maybe you got it when you were baptized, or for a birthday? At any rate, that blanket has given you some **warmth and comfort** over the years.

I have here the afghan/blanket that my mom used when she was living in the nursing home before she died. Now I use this afghan to **give me some warmth and comfort too**. When I think about my mom, I remember how much she loved me and how hard she worked to make sure that I was **safe and happy**. **Who tries to keep you safe and happy?** My mom is the one who **introduced me to Jesus**. **Who tells you about Jesus?**

Do you see the picture of the plant growing in a hole in the sidewalk? That plant is growing in a tough spot. This picture reminds me that we live in a sometimes scary and dangerous world. Sometimes things don't always go so well for us. Sometimes we get sick, hurt or in trouble. We may **feel stuck in a bad place**. We may wonder **what can I do**. We may wonder **who will help us**.

Well, you know that your parents, grandparents, pastor and others will help you. But even more important for you to remember is that **Jesus will help you**. No matter how bad things might get in your life, Jesus will always be there to help you. He is always working to help you to be **safe and happy**. Jesus is like our blankets that give us **warmth and comfort**. Jesus can help us to grow even in the toughest situations. **All you need to do is ask and Jesus will help!**

Someday, just like my mom did, your parents will grow old and die. That will be many years from now. They won't be here to look after you anymore. That's why they are working hard to make sure that you know **Jesus is your best and forever friend**. **That's why they brought you here today**. Thanks be to God. Amen.

## **ADULT MESSAGE**

**“Do not be afraid, stand firm, and see the deliverance that the Lord will accomplish for you today...**

**The Lord will fight for you and you have only to keep still.”**

(Exodus 14:13b-14)

**Between a rock and a hard place.** (Show flower in sidewalk photo.) That’s where God’s people, Israel, found themselves. After the death of all the first born Egyptian boys, the Egyptian Pharaoh had reluctantly set them free from slavery. They were following Moses toward the new Promised Land, came to the Red Sea (Sea of Reeds) and now the Egyptian Pharaoh, his army and chariots came in hot pursuit of them. The sea on one side and the angry slave masters on the other. **What shall we do?** The Israelites **cried out to the Lord in fear for their lives.**

**Fear** - swords, spears and chariots will do that to a person. So will cancer, Alzheimer’s, heart attacks and strokes. Job loss, marriage problems, child in trouble, chemical dependency – **between a rock and a hard place. Death by drowning** seemed so wicked that some of them **wished that they had stayed in slavery** – beaten, abused, tortured, helpless and hopeless. We should have been satisfied to be slaves.

Do you **know anything about being enslaved** to something or someone? So many people in our own country, in our own time – have known bondage of one sort or another. Refugees, illegal immigrants, children raised in chemically dependent homes, LGBT folks, native people, people whose skin color is different from mine, elderly, differently abled, women who have been sexually assaulted. I don’t know who is telling the truth in our Supreme Court hearings, but thousands of other women have cried out, **“This has happened to me!”** Somehow, those voices have brought about an **unheard of “compromise”** on that committee.

**The Christian church is in decline all over the country. First Lutheran faith family has been holding its own and maybe even growing in some ways. And we are doing everything we can to bring God’s life-giving Word to this day, this generation and to our lonely, hurting and needy world. And we are between a**

rock and a hard place. The past is gone. The future waits. Evil runs rampant. Too many families think they stand alone in a frightening world. Lives/souls are being lost. Churches are closing by the dozens in our beloved Minnesota.

Who will save the kids? How can our church reach them? While people are living longer than ever before, many in the **older generation** say,

- We never did it that way before... We always did it this way... We can't change...
- Let the younger generation teach the children now. We did it when our kids were little.

The **younger generation** responds,

- We don't have the time, energy or money. We're too busy...
- Our kids need to be in every sport/activity/event possible so they:
  - a. Hang around with good company.
  - b. Learn to be good.
  - c. Get a good education.
  - d. Build good prospects for their plans for the future...

So, while we are focused on ourselves or busy with all of these things, we may well be missing out on God's plans for our future and our eternity. We may be forgetting that God is our constant companion, best friend, loving savior and the giver of every good gift in life.

A speaker at the Bishop's Theological Conference Pastor Jordan and I attended this week made an interesting distinction. She said, when people are challenged to try to make some kind of a difference, they often respond, "**You have to realize that we are living in the real world.**" This implies, "**Get a life. Things are so bad there's no changing them.**" Our speaker argues, "**The world we live in is 'a' real world. We have to admit its reality. However, 'the' real world is the one that Jesus brings, **God's kingdom at work among us.**" Since our baptism, God's kingdom is where our citizenship and our salvation are to be found. **What is God going to do? Where is God headed? Will we follow? We are followers of Jesus. So, how do we feed people until Jesus comes again?****

Many people are born into this world **differently abled**. They face limitations in ability that most people don't have to be concerned with. Did you see the article

in this week's **Aitkin Age**? It featured a "**Disability Dance**" that is held at **St. James Catholic Church** one night/month. When I was a kid, people with physical or emotional disabilities **were often sidelined**. They were not a part of public school classes, sports, clubs or events. They may have been institutionalized. Today **St. James church, First Lutheran, DAC Mart, our schools, social services** and many other organizations work to move people **from side-lined to mainstream**. That is coming out from between a rock and a hard place.

In **God's "real world," nobody gets left behind**. Hebrew slaves are set free and given a promised land. Differently abled people are helped to live their lives to the fullest. So also with nursing home residents, Alzheimer's patients, homeless people, disabled American veterans, abuse survivors, recovering drug addicts... "**A**" real world or "**the**" real world **God envisions for us** – which do you want to live in? Luther said, "**Do not give the devil more than his due.**" **Don't let evil take center stage. Don't let evil triumph. Focus on Jesus for your help, hope and salvation!**

Last week, Pastor Jordan painted a picture in his sermon of a **dying Sunday school movement** across our country. There are many empty Sunday school rooms all over this community. **Here at First Lutheran, we are using everything but the bathrooms** for classes on **Wednesday nights**. For young families and teens, Wednesdays have **fewer conflicts** than Sundays. I gave Pastor Jordan grief because he didn't clearly spell out what we are trying to do at First Lutheran in response to being between a rock and a hard place.

- The average mainline Christian attends worship once a month. If that's the average, a whole lot of folks must attend less than once a month.
- When I came here, quite a few kids attended Sunday school between services, but few families stayed for worship.
- When we started dismissing kids for class half way through worship, more families started to attend. But, teachers were harder to find, not wanting to miss worship themselves.
- Now Pastor Jordan led us to slip Sunday school back between services. We are working to make our worship service more kid welcoming.

- During **Sunday school**, we are offering opportunities for kids and adults to learn together. On **Wednesday nights**, worship and supper happen together. Then classes are separated by age, including a parents' Bible study. We provide childcare. We offer four different worship times each week. **Will this enable more folks to meet God here?**

**GIG – Growing in God**, we are working hard to share **the Good News of God's great and amazing love come to us in Jesus**. Sundays, Wednesdays, whenever we can. But it's a **lot of work**. **Lots of loving hands and feet are needed**.

- If you can pray for children, youth and families, **we need you**.
- If you can still safely hold a baby, we need you.
- If you can pick up and serve caramel rolls, fruit, juice and coffee...
- If you can make sandwiches and wipe off tables...
- If you are willing to share your love for Jesus with a preschooler...
- If you have some money to help buy education materials and help to pay Pastor Jordan's salary...
- If you can somehow free up one Sunday or Wednesday a month to help us bring our children and grandchildren to **totally trust that Jesus is their best and forever friend...** **WE NEED YOU!**

God **rescued** God's precious people **from slavery** in Egypt, led them through a **scary escape** and then gave them a **fresh chance at living a deep, rich and abundant life** as **God's beloved and trusting people**. God is doing that for:

- Our church family, special needs folks, women who have been sexually assaulted, for you, me and a whole lot of others.

This is a place where **life, help and hope are shared** even in the most difficult times and circumstances. **You are a part of God's work** here. **Have you been blessed** by God's love and care? If so, **then I am certain that you have some blessing to share**. **Next time you find yourself between a rock and a hard place, stop, remember** God is there for you, **listen** to what God tells you to do, then **do it**. The Israelites heard, **"Do not be afraid, stand firm, and see the deliverance that the Lord will accomplish for you today. . ."** **Together, again today, we listen and watch for God to do great things among us.** Amen.