

Brothers and sisters in Christ, grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen

I grew up on a farm that raised small grains and fed feeder calves. We had two feedlots with a mechanical feed trough between them. Feeding the cattle involved opening doors on the silos and watching the augers work. One day, it might have been when I was home from college for a weekend, my dad decided to walk around one of the feedlots while the rest of us watched in the feed room. Maybe 10 minutes later I happened to be looking out the window into one feed lot, when to my amazement, I saw my dad go flying-racing across my view holding onto the tail of a calf. I didn't see how it ended, but he came into the feed room a few minutes later. I told him I saw him and wondered what had happened.

He said he was checking to see if any calves were sick and thought this one maybe looked like it was bloating. That's a buildup of gas in one of the stomachs. He thought maybe if I grab its tail, the shock will cause the gas to move. But as soon as he grabbed the tail it took off so fast he couldn't let go. Then when he was flying along behind it, he wasn't sure how to let go without getting hurt. I forget how he said it ended. But I think that as he suddenly found himself flying along, holding the tail, he might have thought, "What have I gotten myself into?"

That's a question we should be asking as we think of how we do church in 2019. What have I gotten myself into? It can actually be quite an exciting and creative question to deal with. Back 3,800 years ago, God told a man named Abraham, living in the present area of Lebanon to go from his father's house to the land that the Lord would give him, that the Lord would make of Abraham a great nation. Then the Lord said that the Lord would bless Abraham and his descendents and use them to be a blessing to the world.

Abraham believed the Lord, trusted the Lord and went, eventually settling in Canaan, present day Israel. But in the years to come there was a famine that caused Abraham and his wife to go to Egypt to find food. No child was born for many years and Abraham decided he had to have a child with his wife's servant. There is more to the story, but through all this, Abraham probably asked the question, "What have I gotten myself into?" In time a child was born to Abraham and his wife Sarah, they lived in the land of Israel and the descendents became a great nation.

At the same time, the Israelites never were very good at being a blessing to the world. They didn't do a good job of inviting other peoples to come to know the Lord. In fact, they tended to just dwell on being God's chosen people and take care of only themselves. The history of the Old Testament shows how this played out.

Now fast forward 1,800 years to the time of Jesus. He selects twelve disciples, teaches them, sends them out to teach and heal. Jesus is arrested, crucified and killed. In last Sunday's Gospel, Jesus tells the two women at the tomb to tell His disciples to meet Him in Galilee. Today's Gospel continues that story. Jesus meets the disciples, they fall down and worship Him, which they hadn't done before the crucifixion and Jesus gets right to the point. Jesus says that all authority in heaven and earth has been given to Him, which means he has the power and authority of God, the same God or Lord who spoke to Abraham.

Jesus then says, go, make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to observe all that Jesus had commanded them. Imagine you are one of those disciples and you hear Jesus telling you to go to all nations, make disciples and teach them all that Jesus taught! Would you think that maybe your boat is so small and the sea is so big? Would you ask, “What have I gotten myself into?” Eleven people to take on the whole world!

But they started. They met in the Temple to pray and praise God, hear the Scriptures and then also told everyone they could the story of Jesus. They eventually get kicked out of the Temple because they preached Jesus as the Messiah, the Christ. They met in homes and met on the first day of the week in honor of Jesus’ resurrection. The apostle Paul will join them and he will go to synagogues around the Mediterranean Sea and share the news, creating disciples and he also will get kicked out of the synagogues. But the church grew and the good news of Jesus began to touch lives and people came to know the peace of Jesus Christ, that passes all understanding.

Those first disciples may not have known what they had gotten into. But they changed the world by trying this and that so that God’s intent to bless the world through Abraham and now through Jesus and His followers could be carried out. Someone told me this week that this story today is meant for pastors. I said I don’t think only pastors. It is spoken to Jesus’ disciples, His followers. Aren’t we all His followers and disciples? Which means that we should be asking the question, “What have I gotten myself into?”

We have gotten ourselves into opportunities to be the church in the most effective and exciting ways we can think of! My dad, trying to help that calf also got a pretty exciting ride himself. We can think this text is for pastors, but why let pastors have all the fun? When I was here as your Intentional Interim Pastor in 2000-2001, I saw a church that wanted to do ministry. First Lutheran is still that same way. When Jesus told His disciples to go, make disciples, baptizing and teaching, the sky was the limit on how to do that! The disciples received the Holy Spirit, they preached everyway and everywhere they could, in worship areas, homes, jails where they were thrown at times, on ships. Philip was sent to a dusty road to speak to an Ethiopian government official. Paul spoke to kings and the emperor of the Roman Empire.

What are your ideas to be the church in this time? To go, make disciples, baptize and teach? How do we do this here and now in this time? Last week 8-9 people met with me to get a more organized visitation ministry to shut-ins, the elderly and others in need. Through the years I have thought that we need to form a ministry that would visit people who we don’t see in church anymore. To find out what happened, what healing or support they need.

More Bible studies is a goal of the Strategic Plan and it was also brought up in the “Who Are We Now” sessions. How are we doing with that? Not too well, actually, but I want to try something that will involve a Bible study using text messages. I will have a verse, two or three sentences of explanation and then two or three questions for people to think about, write a text of response if they wish. This can also be done anytime during the day that a person wants, like lunch break, doing exercises on a treadmill or waiting for kids or someone. The Endowment Fund has opened a fascinating idea of supporting family and mission with projects.

What can we do with a welcome and warmth to more people so all know they are loved and cared about here? More community outreach and impact was brought up—what are your ideas?

Get together, discuss, plan and come to the council to get their approval and support and then go with it.

This church and others have a common problem that relates to a situation where squirrels got into a church and grew and caused major trouble. Nothing worked to get rid of them. Until at one council meeting someone noticed there were no more squirrels in the church. Finally the pastor admitted that he was able to baptize and confirm the squirrels and they hadn't been seen since. How do we keep youth involved in the church? We have some ministries working on that, but what else can we do, what other out of the box ideas can we look at? This is an exciting time for us as we think about what we have gotten ourselves into.

Martin Luther said that evangelism, (sharing the good news of Jesus, going, making, baptizing and teaching,) is like one beggar telling another where to find food. We have been claimed and found by Jesus. We have a peace that passes all understanding through our faith in Jesus. There is a world here in the church and outside that is waiting to be blessed by the presence of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. That's what we have gotten ourselves into! Amen.