

10/24/2021 Pentecost 22 Youth Sunday

Dialogue Sermon

Davis Ferner, Jonathan Lakeman, Pastor Tim McKenzie

Jeremiah 31:7-9; Psalm 126; Hebrews 7:23-28; Mark 10:46-52

“Go, your faith has made you well”

Pastor Tim - Introduction

Good morning. Today’s message is in the form of a conversation – a dialogue sermon – between Davis Ferner, Jonathan Lakeman and myself. I am grateful to Davis and Jonathan for their thoughtful preparation for today’s message. The themes today are about God gathering people into the church from every corner of the earth. The church is gathered through the power of the Holy Spirit, who gathers children, youth and adults of every age into Christ’s body, the church.

I realize that for some of us, our “teenage years” may seem a bit like the misty past, but none of us came fully formed into this world with faith. All of us had mentors and people who cared deeply about our faith and growth in God’s grace. I am pretty certain that at some stage in our lives, as children, young people or adults, someone took or invited each of us to church, helped us enter the mystery of prayer, and helped us begin to experience God’s grace in the sacraments. Today, we are blessed by St. Mark’s young people as they share their faith with us.

When I was a young person, I was also an acolyte, a crucifer, a lector, and a youth choir member. I went to youth group “lock-ins” and was a summer camp counselor. I spent many summers at Lutheran church camps: family and choir camps at Camp Augustana in Wisconsin, and Summer Youth Camp at “LOMC,” the Lutheran Outdoor Ministry Center in Illinois. As a college student, I went hiking and camping in the White Mountains at Camp Calumet, a Lutheran camp in New Hampshire. As a young missionary in Japan, I helped lead Bible camps in the mountains and at the seashore. I have experienced and seen how God helps young people grow, both in this country and globally. God gathers the church together from the ends of the earth. All of our young people have gifts, voices, and a story to tell of God’s love in their life.

So I’d like to ask Davis and Jonathan to share a bit of their own stories. Please tell us a bit about how you have grown in faith at St. Mark’s. What have worship, youth group, and mission trips meant for you? *Davis, why don’t you start?*

Davis: Faith has been a huge part in my life ever since I was born. Going through St. Marks youth group has had a major impact on my faith and my experiences. Some of the best memories I have come through youth activities or mission trips. One of my favorite experiences was when we took a

mission trip to Nashville. I was tasked with helping out older people in an assisted living community. It was great helping out these people, talking to them, and learning about their experiences. Another great trip that I took with the youth group was to the National Lutheran Convention in Houston, Texas. This was one of my favorite trips because it was great to hear the speakers every night talk about God and how faith relates to my life. It was also really cool to see all these people that are my age, that share the same faith as me. Confirmation has also been a great part of my faith. I really enjoyed sitting down and talking through some of the difficult passages in the Bible and how they relate to present times. *I'll hand it off to Jonathan.*

Jonathan: Thank you, Davis. In my time with St. Mark's, I have come to understand that having faith is simply more than going to worship every week and listening to the hymns. As I understand faith, it is actively spreading God's love to others, like the line in Galatians: "Faith active in love." There was a woman who we helped in Morehead City whose house had flooded due to the hurricanes. I never personally helped repair her house during my time there, but I will never forget the look of surprise and gratefulness she had when we took her out to dinner. I knew that we had made a difference in this woman's life, and that, to me, is actively spreading God's love. *Back to you, Pastor Tim*

Pastor Tim

Thank you Davis and Jonathan for sharing about how you have grown in faith at St. Mark's. In today's gospel, Jesus tells a blind man named Bartimaeus, "*Go, your faith has made you well.*" In the gospels, faith in Jesus is what heals and restores us. Jesus told Bartimaeus, "*Go*" – which means Bartimaeus started a new journey, healed, so that he could now share his faith and gifts with others in a new way. As you listen to today's sermon, I invite you to think about the power of faith in your life. Where were you when you were a teenager like Davis and Jonathan? How has faith helped you in the midst of life's challenges, so that you have been able to "*Go*" into the world to help others?

In the reading from Jeremiah, God is described as the one who gathers parents and children, the sick and the weak, and those in need. God is the one who leads us beside streams of water where we will not stumble, and when we do stumble, God's grace is always with us. Jeremiah and Mark are describing God as the one who gathers, heals and sends. We experience this in worship as we are gathered together, healed with forgiveness, and restored with the bread and wine of the Eucharist.

Christ feeds us at the table and says, “*Go, your faith has made you well.*” “Go” back into the world to serve others as they face difficulty and challenge.

Davis and Jonathan, can you describe how faith has helped you in a moment of difficulty or challenge in your life? *Jonathan, why don't you share first this time?*

Jonathan: Thank you, Pastor. Faith is helping me right now, actually. I am the captain of the Cross Country team at Providence High School, and I injured my knee a few weeks ago, and cannot run because of it. I am really struggling with not being able to lead the team as a runner, but I have faith that God will see me through this rough patch. I am learning how to be a part of the team, while not being able to run. I still attend practices because I still need to support my team. This past Wednesday, at the Conference Championship, I cheered as loud as any of the parents that day. Later, after the race, several athletes came up to me and said that I had helped them find that little bit of extra energy to finish the race. That alone made my day, and made me glad that I was able to be there to support them. I understand that, though things happen to us in life that we may not always understand or be able to control, God loves us, and that faith is, ultimately, our greatest power as humans. We can get knocked down again and again, but God will never abandon us, so long as we have faith in God's will for our lives. *Davis, what about you?*

Davis: A difficult moment during my life came on a Boy Scout hiking trip. We originally planned to hike 7 miles to our campsite for the night, and hike out the remaining 2 miles the next day. As we were about to set off, a state trooper came to us and directed us on a way that he thought our group was going. We set off and about 5 miles in, we realized that we had arrived at our original starting point. All the younger scouts were tired and some were out of water. As one of the older scouts on the trip, I knew that I had to be strong to lead the rest of the group out. Even though I was also tired and was aching in pain, I continued to encourage the group to keep a steady pace and try to get done as quickly as possible. In this moment I kept thinking of Jesus as the Shepard to all of us. I envisioned myself as a strong leader, like Jesus, helping lead others and corral everyone to come together and power out the rest of our hike. God has been someone who I can rely on when I get thrown off track, but with God I always know that things will work out. We ended up getting back to our campsite at around 11:30 at night and hiked the rest of the 2 miles out the next day with no issue, even though we had hiked over 14 miles. *Back to you, Pastor Tim.*

Pastor Tim

Thank you Jonathan and Davis for sharing about your own struggles and challenges, and how faith has helped you. Our life of faith and service for others begins with what God has first done for us. “*We love because God first loved us*” (1 John 4:19). To say it another way, “*For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God*” (Ephesians 2:8). In other words, because of God’s grace, we love; because of God’s grace, we serve. Everything begins with God’s love and grace. Davis and Jonathan have described how, during times of challenge, God’s grace and faith have helped them walk alongside and lead others.

Because of God’s grace toward us, our faith becomes active in love toward others. Davis and Jonathan, you have shared about your struggles and God’s graceful help. Can you describe a gift that you feel God has given to you, enabling you to help others - something you are thankful to God for? *Davis, why don’t you start this time?*

Davis: A gift that God has given me is the gift of being gracious. I have grown up in the church and in Boy Scouts all of my life. I believe that this has allowed me to share God’s grace in a lot of ways. I often find myself going out of my way to help out a friend or ask about how they are doing. I am grateful that being involved with church and Scouts has given me opportunities to help people that others may not always have. My Eagle Scout Project was to build three picnic tables for St. Mark’s that many of the neighbors use to eat lunch on every week at the Soup Kitchen. I have also had opportunity to volunteer at various church activities that go towards benefiting the less fortunate such as the Soup Kitchen, Room in the Inn, and mission trips. God has put me in a position to help others and I have taken full advantage of it. *How about you, Jonathan?*

Jonathan: I think my greatest gift from God is my empathy, my ability to feel what others feel, or to try to put myself in their shoes. This past year, I noticed a friend of mine on the cross-country team wasn’t smiling as much, he didn’t seem happy like he had been last summer. Seeing him like this really hurt me, so I talked to him, and found out that he was worried he wouldn’t make the team this season. So I worked with some parents and the coach to raise money to help him go to a cross-country camp, where we trained hard and learned how to be better runners, in addition to building stronger bonds within the team. When my friend made the team, he was overjoyed, and I was happy to know that, using this gift that God has given me, I was able to help my friend. *Back to you, Pastor Tim.*

Pastor Tim

Thank you Davis and Jonathan for your witness to us today. Davis, by being gracious, you are sharing God's grace. Jonathan, by being empathetic, you are sharing God's compassion. You have both described how we respond to God's grace and love in our lives - by incarnating God's love to others. Leadership isn't about pulling or forcing people, but the leadership you have described is about walking with others in their suffering with grace and compassion. This is what Jesus did for Bartimaeus in today's gospel. Jesus met Bartimaeus in his suffering, healed him and sent him on his way, saying, "*Go, your faith has made you well.*" May God continue to bless you and all of our young people as you seek to use your gifts, acting with grace and compassion for others.

The witness of our young people this morning is a reminder that all of us have grown in faith and will continue to grow with the help of God's grace. I want to thank all of the youth involved in today's service and also Alex English, who has been such a faithful mentor to all our young people.

Today's service reminds me that next week is Reformation Sunday, a day on which we give thanks to God for grace and faith which free us to serve others. We are as Peter says, a "royal priesthood." Today we will see a sign of "the priesthood of all believers" as we hold our October Annual Meeting after worship to elect new members to St. Mark's Congregation Council. Together we are Christ's body, St. Mark's Lutheran Church. Your presence and vote are important to our life together as a church. Please make time to stay for this important meeting.

Like Davis, Jonathan, and all of our young people today sharing of their faith and gifts, this congregation, St. Mark's Lutheran Church, is alive with the gifts of God's grace. May you leave church today, strengthened by the witness of young people in word and sacrament - strengthened by God's grace – and may you serve others with graciousness and empathy, ready to share the grace and compassion that we have already received from God.

Jesus says, "*Go, your faith has made you well.*" May we go out again today ready to serve others with grace and compassion. Amen.