

Easter 5 – May 10, 2020
Text: John 14:1-14
Theme: Time for a Change

**People don't like change do they? You know the old joke,
"How many Lutherans does it take to change a lightbulb?"
"Change? What's change?"**

**Lutherans get picked on a lot for avoiding change at all costs,
but in reality, everyone prefers not to change. We like things to
stay the same, but sometimes, we have no choice but to change.**

**For instance, I totally dislike doing Holy Communion the way
that we're doing it but right now we have no choice but to make
concessions so that people feel safe receiving the Sacrament. And,
although I have never been a big fan of sharing the peace, some
people really miss it. Zoom meetings are highly efficient, and it
might be nice to be able to conduct business from your home, but
we miss something by not being in the room together. All of these
changes have been thrust upon us and we have had little choice in
the matter. The world changed on us.**

**Yet, here is something we have not changed, but we
desperately need to change. I hope it doesn't have to come to a full
on crisis for us to change. We have to change the way we pass the
faith on to the next generation. What we used to do is not working
anymore. Of all the children we baptize in the Lutheran churches**

in America (that is WELS, LCMS, ELCA, NALC and LCMC), only 5-10% end up as fully involved adult members. We have to step up and do a better job of communicating the faith to people, because it does not happen by itself. We went through a brief time in this country when everything was pretty easy. Practically everyone was Christian. Even when I was in school, it was full of Christian teachers and Christian kids. People were happy when a teacher shared his faith, and my pastor was often invited to pray before football and basketball games. Churches were overflowing with kids and you know that kids always want to be where other kids are. So faith transmission was pretty easy. It just happened by itself.

But that time of easy faith transmission was a blip on the radar screen of the universe. I think it came into being sometime around the turn of the 20th century and began receding around 1960. It was only there for about 2 or 3 generations. Before the 20th century, families were expected to teach the faith to their own children just as they were expected to teach them to read, write and function in day to day life. There was no mentality of hiring professionals to teach your children. Even if you were fortunate enough to have a school in your community, religious training happened mostly at home and there was a different attitude

towards religious training. The pastors and teachers were expected to check that the child was grasping the faith but it was the family who did the teaching and modeling.

Today, the world has moved on again and if a child is not educated in religious matters at home, he very likely will not learn about Jesus because, for the most part, in a home where the faith is not taught and modeled, neither is there much commitment to worship and Sunday school. We need to change how we do things. We need to refocus our thinking on religious education. But, in reality, while this is new for us, this has really been the way of Christianity since day one. Jesus did not come to earth and say, "Hey, just keep doing what you're doing and relax. I'll handle all the challenges."

In our Gospel for today, he said "Let not your hearts be troubled," but that doesn't mean sit on your hands and do nothing. It means trust in Jesus by doing what he tells you to do. Look at the reading today from the book of Acts. Jesus had not been gone long at all, maybe only a couple years or even less, and the Church was already bickering and whining. The Jews and the Greeks were arguing about who was getting more attention from the pastors. What did the pastor's do? They were pragmatic. They changed. They appointed people to pay attention to social ministry so that

they could worry about preaching and teaching. The Church has to change as there is need for change.

Change is not scary if you're focused on the right thing. Nor is tradition bad if it is focused on the right thing. Our whole mission is to proclaim Christ as the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through him. Proclaim Christ. Whatever we have in our arsenal that does this, old or new, is good, and whatever we don't have, we need to develop. Whatever we do that does not accomplish the passing on of the faith, we drop because we don't have unlimited time or resources. Our only goal is to start with the children of the congregation and make certain that they know Jesus as the way, the truth and the life and then work out from there. Everything we do needs to be evaluated through that filter. It does not matter what is familiar to us or convenient for us. Our mission statement is "Always Growing in Christ." Everything we do and say is built around helping people grow in their relationship with Jesus whether that is an old relationship or a brand new one.

By the way, we should not feel badly, that we have to be reminded of this over and over again. The Devil works very hard to distract us. He uses good and bad things to draw our attention away from passing on the faith. Sure he has lots of evil stuff: sex,

drugs, and greed; but he is even more successful with the stuff that seems harmless or even good: work, sports, leisure and plain old human apathy. Look at the Gospel for today. The apostles had been walking with Jesus in the flesh for quite a while.

“Philip said to him, ‘Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip?’” Philip, an apostle, a man who walked and talked with Christ, had missed the point. Because we are Christians, Satan will try to distract us from the truth. We will be tempted to pursue our own agenda, our own convenience, even our own glory.

Jesus patiently brings us back to our mission, over and over again. Not only that, but he reminds us of where we receive the power to complete the mission he has given us.

“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.”

Those are powerful words. “If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.” We have to change. We have to improve how we are teaching the faith. Jesus says to ask him and he will do it.

Start there. Before we start a new program. Before we send out postcards, make phone calls and line up volunteers. Ask Jesus.

Begin asking him over and over to draw our attention, to use us and to empower us to teach the faith to the people of our community before we do anything else. And then, once we have proclaimed His Word, to reach through that Word and through Holy Baptism to create powerful and enduring faith in every person who hears. Start there. Pray every day. Refocus your attention. Look for opportunities to teach the faith wherever you are and watch and see what Christ can do.