

St. James Lutheran Church

June 20, 2010

Pentecost IV

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First Reading: Isaiah 65:1-9

Second Reading: Galatians 3:23-29

Gospel: Luke 8:26-39

All of Us

It's easy to get intimidated by some of the big words in the bible. The person assigned to be the reader on Pentecost Sunday can break into a sweat in anticipation of the challenges contained in Acts 2: Mesopotamia, Cappadocia, Phrygia, Pamphylia. Some words are hard to pronounce, others are hard to understand, big, theological terms like: justification, sanctification, resurrection, apocalypse. And yet sometimes it's not the big, many-syllable words that challenge us, but little, simple, single-syllable words – like the word "all."

Listen again to these verses from our second reading today, from Paul's letter to the Galatians: ". . . you are all children of God through faith . . ." "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." So much for all the distinctions and boundaries we have learned to draw! So much for the way we have grown accustomed to seeing other people! It's time to open our eyes and start seeing the way God sees. God doesn't see Gentile or Jew, male or female, Lutheran or Catholic, Republican or Democrat, rich or poor, white or Hispanic, American or Iranian. God sees persons he created in his own image. God sees people he sent his Son to save.

Paul urges the Galatians (and all of us) to see all people with new eyes. His aim is not some form of political correctness, but rather a change of heart. As Paul's heart was changed to see Gentiles as equal members of the covenant, so he calls for a change in our hearts and minds. The good

news is not just for some of the people but for all the people. And in order to fully participate in this good news- to live the gospel – you and I need to see with new eyes.

When we look at other people, instead of focusing on differences and distinctions, we need to see what we have in common, our shared condition. That little word “all” shows up in lots of places in the bible.

“All go to one place; all are from the dust, and all turn to dust again.” Ecclesiastes 3:20 We are all mortal. We all breathe the same air, and one day we all will breathe it no more.

“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Romans 3:23 Sin is a universal human condition All of us know what it is to do what we should not do, and to fail to do what we should. Any talk of “bad people” and “good people” blatantly ignores the reality that no one is truly good but God. All are sinners.

“The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season.” Psalm 145:12 We are all dependent. None of us created our lives and none of us can sustain our lives. All God’s creatures depend on their Creator. So the simple truth is, we’re all in the same boat. And we’re all in steerage. There’s no first or second class on this cruise. No one has any special claim to privilege or status. As has been said, at the foot of the cross the ground is very level – we all share an equal footing.

Seeing that we all share a common condition, it’s important to see that the grace of God is for all of us. God doesn’t play favorites. God’s mercy isn’t just for some of us. We need to see each and every person as one for whom Christ died.

* “For as all die in Adam, so will all be made alive in Christ.” I Corinthians 15:22

* “The death he died, he died to sin, once for all.” Romans 6:10

* God has made all people prisoners of disobedience, so that he might show mercy to them all.” Romans 11:32

You see, God doesn’t love some of us all the time, or all of us some of the time. God loves all of us, all the time. God began with his chosen

people, the children of Abraham and Sarah. But from the very start, God's plan was to bless all people. Genesis 12:3 "through you I will bless all the nations."

Seeing with new eyes, seeing as God sees, seeing all people as mortal, dependent sinners, seeing all people as loved by God – changes the way we behave.

- * "If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it." I Corinthians 12:26. It's no longer every man for himself. Instead, there is an organic connectedness. We're all part of one body. We share both joys and sorrows. If anyone is enslaved, then none of us is truly free.
- * "So far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all." Romans 12:18. Jesus bluntly tells us there's no gain in loving only those who love us in return. We are to love all people, even our enemies. This doesn't mean approving or condoning the hurtful things that others may do. It means loving them despite those hurtful things.
- * "He died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them." 2 Corinthians 5:15. This is the transforming insight. Once we see that Christ died for all of us, we see everyone in a new light. Recognizing that all are made worthy by the love of God in Christ, we can no longer see ourselves or others the same way. And we can no longer live for ourselves only.
- * It's for this reason that Lutheran Social Services serves all people – not just Lutherans.
- * Lutheran World Relief provides care for all kinds of people – different nationalities and different religions.
- * Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services settles refugees from all backgrounds. (Mr. Pejman was a Kurdish Muslim).

That little word "all" compels us to widen our vision, and to open wide our arms in compassionate care.

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Now, it must also be said: seeing as God sees doesn't mean overlooking or in any way condoning human sinfulness, cruelty and depravity. Not at all. God's love is not blind. To see with God's eyes is to see people as they are. Seeing that God's grace is for all people doesn't mean "anything goes." What it means is seeing that no one is beyond the reach of God. No one is ineligible for love and mercy. Seeing with new eyes doesn't mean that differences no longer exist. It does mean that God's grace transcends all differences, overcomes all barriers.

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Paul knew as well as anyone that, this side of heaven, our vision will always be imperfect. We aim to see as God sees, to love all people, all the time. But we fall short of this ideal. For now we see "as in a mirror, dimly," "as through a glass, darkly." I Corinthians 13:12. For now, we keep encouraging and reminding one another to see with the eyes of Christ – and to live our lives for his sake.

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A rabbi once put a question to his students: "How can you recognize the time when night ends and day begins?"

"Is it when, from a great distance, you can tell a dog from a sheep?" one student proposed.

"No," said the rabbi.

"Is it when, from a distance, you can tell a date palm from a fig tree?" another suggested.

"No," said the rabbi.

"Then when is it?" they asked.

"It is when you look into the face of any human creature and you see your brother or sister. Until then, it is still night."

Let us pray.

Gracious God and Father of us all, you are above all and through all and in all. Give us eyes to see as you see, so we recognize all people as fellow sinners for whom Christ died. Change our hearts, so that instead of seeking to draw boundaries that exclude, we become instruments of your

transforming grace. We ask this in the name of the one in whom all things hold together, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen