

Wednesday, March 2, 2016

Psalm 71:15-24

Luke 24:44-49

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen.

Last week we focused on the second of the five faith practices we lift up and promise to do our best, with God's help, to carry out as disciples of Jesus Christ. That practice was: to hear the word of God and share in the Lord's Supper. This week we journey onward in our progression of lifting up the third of these practices: to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed. The other three are: to live among God's faithful people, to serve all people following the example of Jesus, and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth. I list them each and every week as a way to engrain them into our identity as baptized sons and daughters of God. As we have lifted up each week and will continue to do so these practices are a gift from God offering us the insight and wisdom of the Holy Spirit in living into the fullness of the covenant God makes with each of us in our baptism. Through these practices God draw us closer to Godself and helps reorient our own lives toward the very One who gives us life and subsequently grow in the relationship we have with the Triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Last week I introduced words from the document, *Faith Practices in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America – Living Our Baptismal Covenant*.ⁱ In regards to tonight's faith practice, to proclaim the good news of God in Christ Jesus through word and deed, it states:

Think about proclaiming the good news. It's easy to envision a pastor in the pulpit on Sunday morning bringing the word of God to the gathered people. But through our baptismal covenant, we all are called to proclaim the good news of God in Christ. Not just the pastor, but every one of us. And not just once, or once in a while. We are called to proclaim the good news day after day, never ceasing, just as the disciples did.

What does it mean to proclaim the good news of God in Christ? As the church, acting together and as individuals, we have a story to tell. We have the story of God's movement in our lives through the saving actions of Jesus Christ. The life, death and resurrection of Jesus is not simply a story in the Bible. Rather it's the story of our lives and the story of what brings us life. We simply share with others how God is working in our lives. We share the story that shapes our story.

We are living out the story of Christ in us. We are proclaiming the story of God's saving grace in our lives when we:

- Invite others to the church where Christ is proclaimed
- Confess our faith through song and word in worship
- Offer encouragement to a friend and others who are ill or in need
- Show Christ through our daily lives and work, which express thanks to God and care for the common good
- Talk about our faith in our homes and with others
- Live prepared to give a reason for the hope within us

Faith is a one-way street in that God is always the primary actor. God alone instills in us the seed of faith and fosters its growth through the Holy Spirit. Yet, faith is also a two-way street in some ways in that God has given us the freedom of choice on what we do with this most precious gift of faith. Will we, with the power of the Holy Spirit, tend to it and nurture its growth? Or will we succumb to all the other choices in the world competing for our attention that draw us away from that beautiful relationship with God we are invited into?

Proclaiming the good news of God in Christ Jesus through word and deed may seem a daunting task to many of us; especially, those of us who are introverts. Yet, like anything that pertains to God and the mission God sets before us we find our strength in the promise we are not alone. In our lesson from Matthew the resurrected Christ meets the disciples in their fear, in their disbelief, and once again continues to instruct them into the truth, which continues to draw them closer to Him. And then he gives them and the church a mission to be witnesses but as the text tells us they are not to go out until what the Father has promised them arrives and that is the Holy Spirit, which will equip them with power, wisdom, and words from God. These

five Wednesdays the Spirit of God is turning us toward the cross of Christ where we offer our prayers, bring our fears, seek healing for our hurts, and through it all God is at work drawing near, feeding us with God's forgiveness that transforms and changes our lives, and growing our faith to trust that God's Spirit is indeed with us giving us the strength to be vessels of God's amazing grace and proclaimers of the good news to all we meet.

¹ For a copy of this document go to: <http://www.elca.org/en/Our-Work/Congregations-and-Synods/Faith-Practices/Living-Our-Baptismal-Covenant>