

THE DAY OF PENTECOST

Year C

May 23, 2010

Acts 2:1-21

John 14:8-17

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Concordia Evangelical Lutheran Church

Duluth, Minnesota

It's been an eventful week among us as a congregation, and the Holy Spirit has been very much at work. And what I want to share is only a glimpse of what the Holy Spirit has been up to in our lives; each of you has your own stories to add.

Last week we publicly welcomed new members into the congregation, some of them joining on that very day, others who had joined sometime earlier and being publicly recognized. The Holy Spirit has enriched each of these individuals with gifts, and their gifts join those of the rest of us, so that we might bring even more and greater gifts of God to our community, so that the world might see more clearly and more fully the face of Jesus among us. That's a high calling, indeed!

We lost one of our own to death this past Monday, surrounded by his loving family. For Ron and his family, it was a long ordeal, with the past six months being unspeakably difficult. While there are situations when we say that death comes as blessing, at the same time death remains our enemy who snatches our loved ones away. In the midst of all of this, the Holy Spirit has swirled around in and through the family. Ron's paternal grandfather was a Lutheran pastor whose wife bore six sons; his grandfather had the privilege of baptizing all of his grandchildren, including Ron and his brother, into the death and resurrection of our Lord. Ron's maternal grandmother was a survivor of the Titanic, whose chaperone brought her from the bowels of the sinking ship, giving up his own life. For Ron's memorial service yesterday, Cal sang, "Precious Lord, Take My Hand." While he sang, I was reminded of Ron's grandmother's chaperone leading her by the hand out of the bowels of death, just as our Lord takes us by the hand and leads us from death to life, giving up his own life in the process. Ron's father was on the board that helped build this building, and he later died of a cerebral hemorrhage on the way home from a congregational meeting. Ron's grandchildren, Cassandra and Alex, are in confirmation here at Concordia. Around midway through this past year, we were talking about prayer. I asked the young people about the practices of prayer in their own homes. Alex was the first to raise his hand. "My dad prays with us every night at home," Alex said. "Do you know how lucky you are?," I answered. Alex's father, Tim, told me that Alex prays for everyone in his family each night before bed. This past weekend, when Ron was in hospice care at Solvay House here in Duluth, Alex didn't know how to pray for his grandfather. Tim said, "Pray that he will have peace" – the peace that passes all understanding.

The same day Ron died, another of our members went into intensive care with an infection in his blood. The news was as grim as it could be, as doctors could not determine

the nature of the bacteria that was attacking Mark's vital organs. Even emergency surgery on Tuesday did not reveal the source of the infection. I have never seen so many IV bags hanging; at one count there were 17; I counted 20. The family has held a constant vigil day and night. At present, Mark's condition is stable but serious. Considering where Mark has been, his family is celebrating "stable." Over these past six days, many stories have been told by his family. Mark is the oldest of three siblings. His mother intended to have four sons and to name them after the four gospel writers. Mark was the firstborn; I wondered if she knew that Mark was the first of the four gospels to be written. Then came John (actually the last of the four to be written), and he is known to us as Jack. The next son was a miscarriage. Last of all came Jean—a surprise! Whether she would have been Matthew or Luke, Jean is an evangelist of the Good News of Jesus Christ nevertheless. Mark, the quietist of the siblings, is described as the glue that holds the family together. To walk into the midst of this family, whether they are weeping at the dire news or rejoicing in the glimmers of hope, is to walk into an embrace of love. It is to walk into a prayer. Our Lord is present in their midst, and they know him.

I spent some time with my father this past week; he is recovering from back surgery. (I learned yesterday at the memorial service that my dad has the same surgeon that Pete VanDerSchaegen, one of our former members, has at Abbott Northwestern Hospital. Small world!) My dad wanted to go to his land in Wisconsin, the last 40 acres of what had been his father's farm. Dad had many projects he wanted me to do for him. I am learning that when you are sick and not able to do any work, you construct lists upon lists of chores that need doing, and doing in a certain order and in a certain way. The problem with my dad is that he wants everything done at once, all at the same time. Dad was especially thrilled that all four of his recently installed bluebird houses were occupied; we had to take special care not to disturb them as we worked, even planting a cherry tree near one of the houses. All the while we worked—or rather while I worked and he watched, immobilized by his back brace—Dad sang songs—that is, when he wasn't telling me what to do and how to do it. The song he sang the most was "Joyous Light of Heavenly Glory," from Marty Haugen's *Holden Evening Prayer*, which we use during our midweek Lenten services. Dad says that's his favorite song. As we sat at the campfire, watching the day turn to night, Dad told stories of his youth and of his family. His life is filled with gratitude to God for a lifetime of blessings.

When I first got to Dad's house in Wyoming, Minnesota, I gave his wife, Julie, my stepmother, a gift of a prayer shawl that our daughter knit for her; it was Maia's first attempt at making one, using our church prayer shawl pattern. Julie will be having surgery, also, next month. That shawl will give Julie great comfort, as all the prayer shawls that come from our prayer shawl ministry do. I remembered a story Julie told me not long ago from the time her first husband died of cancer when he was still a young man. Julie was lying in her bed crying, wondering what might become of her. Suddenly she was overcome with a great peace. It was as if a blanket had been laid upon her. "That's why the Holy Spirit is called the Comforter, because he gives us comfort," she said.

Today is Pentecost Sunday, when we celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit to the church. The Holy Spirit comes to us in many and various ways, and the Spirit has shown up in

countless ways in our midst just this past week. The Spirit brings to mind our Lord Jesus and makes his presence known to us. For me, the Holy Spirit comes to me most profoundly and most predictably in worship, especially in the hymns, the prayers, the liturgy, the music. Today we thank our musicians, especially the Senior Choir and the Joyful Voices, who fill our hearts with music, and, with it, the gift of the Holy Spirit. We also experience the Holy Spirit in the teaching of the life and ministry of Jesus. Today we recognize all the teachers and guides in our Youth and Family ministries. We experienced the Holy Spirit at Solvay Hospice House as Ron died, and again yesterday at his memorial service. The Holy Spirit has swirled around the hospital, bringing comfort, hope, and peace to Mark and his family. The Holy Spirit ministered to me while I was with my dad on his land in Wisconsin, hearing him sing, and hearing the song of the birds singing sweetly in the trees.

My father can't seem to stop singing "Joyous Light of Heavenly Glory." I share the last verse with you:

You who made the heaven's splendor, ev'ry dancing star of night,
make us shine with gentle justice, let us each reflect your light.
Mighty God of all creation, gentle Christ who lights our way,
loving Spirit of salvation, lead us on to endless day.
(*ELW 561*)

Thanks be to God!