

Sermon – Matthew 10:24-39; Romans 6:1b-11
David R. Lyle
Grace Lutheran Church
3 Pentecost – Year A
21 June 2020

“Found by Life”

Sisters and brothers, friends in Christ, grace be unto you and peace this day, in the name of God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. Today is a good day. It's Father's Day, a day set aside in my household to celebrate the awesomeness that is me. Yesterday morning I came downstairs only to be quickly met by the kids, telling me I couldn't come down to the basement where they were making gifts for me. When I get home, I'll find out what those gifts are. Lunch will be made. I will be hailed, I can only assume and with good reason, as the world's best dad. Today is a good day. I wouldn't mind having every day be a little bit more like today. Which makes me wonder what Jesus is up to in our reading from Matthew. "I have come to set a man against his father," he says, "and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and one's foes will be members of one's own household." Eek, Jesus, come on. "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me." I don't know about this, Jesus. One would be forgiven for thinking that Matthew wasn't paying attention that day and simply misheard his teacher.
2. William Goettler of Yale Divinity School tells of his mother-in-law, who feels the same way. I hope Dr. Goettler had his mother-in-law's permission to share this story but she, a faithful Roman Catholic, insists that in this passage, "Jesus goes too far. The Jesus that she knows comes to bring peace, not a sword. While she has spent enough time around the church to recognize that discord happens within the community of the faithful, her Jesus would never

have encouraged such division in the midst of family.” “How,’ she wonders, ‘did this ever get into the Bible?’”

3. In last week’s installment of Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus encouraged people to follow him: Take nothing with you! Go among the wolves! You’ll be hated and persecuted! But wait, there’s more! Today Jesus tells us that not only will it be hard *out there*, it will be hard *in here*, in the relationships that mean the most to us. Families will be divided. Communities will be rent asunder. Cherished relationships will fall apart. Really, Jesus? And you’re going to do it on purpose, with a sword? Aren’t we divided enough in this world? In our communities? In our families? It seems there’s division enough to go around already.
4. This past week, Grace’s Religion in Literature group discussed Katherine Boo’s *Behind the Beautiful Forevers*, which chronicles the lives of residents of a Mumbai slum who live near the growing opulence of India’s wealthy class. The people who live in the slum of Annawadi are portrayed as being every bit as human as you and me, but the divisions of life have hammered home to them that they don’t really matter. Boo writes, “Annawadi boys broadly accepted the basic truths: that in a modernizing, increasingly prosperous city, their lives were embarrassments best confined to small spaces, and their deaths would matter not at all.” Noting the vast division and disparity present in so many modern cities, Boo asks a practical question: “Why don’t more of our unequal societies implode?” Indeed. We have enough division to go around. It seems that life – whether on the vast scale of world drama or the smaller screens of our own lives – is at times balanced atop a powder keg. Do we need more division?
5. Let’s remember, Jesus doesn’t create the division; not at first, anyway. We got here all on our own. What Jesus does is into is into enter the divisiveness of this world and die to it, that we might finally die to it, too. We, St. Paul

proclaims (not I but *we*), have been united with Christ in a death like his; we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. Jesus doesn't come to a world in peace and divide it; neither does he come to a divided world and tell us to figure it out. Jesus comes into a divided world to die to our divisive ways, for our sake. In the gift of baptism and with the sword of the Spirit, Jesus cuts down our old lives. By the gift and grace of Jesus alone are we united, but only by dividing us from our old lives of sin and death, freeing us from sin and gifting us with new life, together.

6. In doing this to us, for us, Jesus does something amazing. He invites us to lean into those things that divide us so that, claiming unity in him, we may begin to work on the very real divisions that exist among us. We live in days of great division, as people always have. Over the past month, our national conversation has centered on issues of racism. Voices of the oppressed are being heard in new ways. Old divisions linger, and new ones emerge. Friends, I have had, and heard, so many conversations in recent days surrounding issues of racism. And I have good news! I haven't spoken with a single person who thinks that racism is good or that people of color are bad. Don't get me wrong, I know those people are out there; I'm just saying they haven't come knocking on my door. Even so, I see divisions aplenty. Between those who feel racism is sorry and sinful but confined to the few, and those who feel it is deeply embedded in systems and structures. Between those who think that the problem was mostly addressed in 1865 or 1965, and those who think that neither the Civil War nor the Voting Rights Act solved the underlying sin at the heart of the matter. Between those who believe that the problem is out *there* somewhere, and those who believe that the problem is in *here*, in every human heart.
7. Well I, as always, have my opinions. But more to the point, I've also got good news, even if, like our reading today, it doesn't sound so good at first: We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Today, we are all invited

to repent. To confess our sins and cast ourselves upon the mercy of God. To admit that we don't have it all figured out, but that we can nevertheless drop our defenses and engage within our divisions to seek a new way forward. We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, but Christ died for us. With his sword, he cuts us off from our old lives and sets us free to live free in the Kingdom of God, today. Shall we continue in sin. By no means!

8. We are free, friends. What does this mean? It means that, trusting in the unity held in Christ, Christ holds us in our divisions. These things that separate us are not final, and this means that we can actually engage one another. As one faithful conversation partner put it this week, "It's time to get comfortable being uncomfortable." Amen. I don't believe there are too many people worshipping with us this morning who would disagree with the following statement: The lives of Black people and all people of color matter every bit as much as the lives of white people. If we can agree on this starting point for a conversation about racism, our disagreements about the way forward become opportunities for God to work in our midst, if only we cling in faith to the unity promised to us in Jesus Christ.
9. It's hard work, brothers and sisters. It's cross work and it could cost us much. Jesus wasn't lying; we are divided. His words, however, only *don't* sound like him if you haven't learned to listen. We are dead to our sin and alive in Christ. Seems like we have what we need for the work set before us. So, don't be afraid to engage. Don't be afraid to be uncomfortable. Do be afraid, even, to admit that you were wrong about a thing or two. God counts the hairs of your head and values you more than the sparrow. Goodness, God values you so much that the Father sent the Son to die for us. In Christ is the peace that passes all understanding, a peace that doesn't paper over or suppress our divisions but heals them. I can think of no better way to celebrate Father's Day than taking up the cross and being about our heavenly Father's work. Amen.

And now may the peace that passes all human understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, this day and forever. Amen.