

Pastor Lauren Dow Wegner
Mark 6:1-13
Pentecost 7B

A week ago today,

I was with 5 of our Grace youth and 2 adult leaders,
Worshipping with 31,000 other Lutherans at the NRG
Stadium in Houston, Texas.

That is an experience like no other.

We were connected to all of you back home,
Connected to fellow Christians all over the world.

And the vastness and the miracle of that connection in Christ is truly
overwhelming if we think about it.

Also amazing was the opportunity we had to serve Holy Communion to
just a small section of that 31,000 people.

To put this into perspective,

There were around 1,000 Communion assistants,
375 communion stations throughout the stadium.

We served about 400 people at our 2 stations.

It was a huge effort of coordination and planning on the part of the
Gathering Team.

It might have been tempting to forego putting all of that effort into the
celebration of Communion in that particular setting.

We could have sung,
Heard Scripture,
Heard the proclamation in the sermon,
Prayed,
Professed our faith,
And been sent by God's blessing.

But no,

Celebrating the Eucharist is central to our gathering as Lutheran
Christians.

Celebrating the Eucharist is a given when we worship together.

And so we do it,

Even if it means 375 communion vessels scattered throughout a stadium,

Inevitably some dropped & broken.

Even if it means baking 375 loaves of bread.

Even if it means a thousand questions about the process.

Even if it means, as communion servers, we miss the end of worship and the big reveal of the next Gathering location (Minneapolis in 2021, by the way—so get ready!).

Celebrating the Eucharist is a given when we worship together,

And it's always worth it.

Perhaps because, in the Eucharist,

God changes us.

In the Eucharist,

We become what we receive—

The body and blood of Jesus Christ.

And each time we receive that gift,

No matter how often,

We are changed from fragmented pieces of discord,

Into one body of forgiven saints bearing hope and love into the world,

Bearing Christ into the world.

In the Eucharist,

God changes us and rescues us from our selves,

And unites us to Christ and to one another.

And so, Communion at the Youth Gathering was the most supreme invitation to experience God's gifts,

As the theme of the Youth Gathering was

“This changes everything.”

What could solidify that for us more than this sacrament?

Whenever we are gathered for worship,

Wherever we are gathered for worship,

Our very act of gathering sends a message to the
world—

That this changes everything.

That doing what we do here changes
everything.

That that water changed into a fount
of eternal life changes everything.

That bread and wine changed
into a meal of forgiveness and
grace changes everything.

That Jesus’ death and resurrection changes us.

That it changes the world.

That Jesus changes everything.

In our Gospel today, we hear about Jesus in his hometown--

A place filled with people who knew him when he was young,

And who wondered about who he had become.

Jesus’ childhood friends, family, and neighbors weren’t so sure of who
he was now.

“Isn’t this the carpenter?” they ask.

But in this carpenter named Jesus from Nazareth,

God has changed everything.

God has changed what people thought they knew to be true.

God has changed what people were comfortable with.

God has changed God’s people.

In Jesus,

God changes everything.

I love how, in the Gospel, we hear that

“Jesus could do no deed of power [while in Nazareth],

Except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them.”

That little line is so interesting to me—

“He couldn’t do anything powerful at all. . .

Except cure a few people entirely of their illnesses!”

No big deal.

Except it is a big deal,

Because in and through Jesus,

Everything has changed for even those few who were healed in his hometown.

In and through Jesus,

Even when the majority don’t get it or don’t believe what’s happening,

Everything changes for those who were healed.

Everything changes for those who could see Jesus for who he was.

Everything changes,

And they believe.

A big part of the Youth Gathering included hearing from various speakers with all sorts of stories to tell--

Stories of pain and loss,

Stories of rejection and heartache,

Stories of the realities of sin and death.

And in the midst of these stories,

We heard the power of God’s grace,

Hope,

And love.

One speaker shared about his struggles with physical self-harm that began in his teenage years.

He spoke of how, when he shared this part of his life with one pastor,

The pastor had said to him 5 words:

“You are going to hell.”

And years later,

After leaving the church because of that pastor’s comments,

He came back, to a different church this time,

And, after a while, he courageously shared his story
with his new pastor.

And this pastor also said 5 words, though so very different:

“There is grace for that.”

There is grace.

Grace wherever Jesus is,

Which is everywhere.

Grace wherever Jesus goes,

Which is everywhere.

In his hometown where Jesus isn’t taken seriously,

And in all towns and countries and places where Jesus isn’t
believed to have a place or any power. . .

There is grace.

In our deepest, darkest moments and sinfulness,

There is grace for that,

And for you,

And for the ones you love,

And for the ones you have a really hard time
loving.

