**CHRIST THE KING LVTHERAN CHVRCH**

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Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

[*Genesis 15:1-6*](https://members.sundaysandseasons.com/Home/TextsAndResources)*;* [*Psalm 33:12-22*](https://members.sundaysandseasons.com/Home/TextsAndResources)*;* [*Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16*](https://members.sundaysandseasons.com/Home/TextsAndResources)*;Saint* [*Luke 12:32-40*](https://members.sundaysandseasons.com/Home/TextsAndResources)

***In nomine Jesu!***

Let’s be clear today. This is **not** déjà vu all over again! Our context and all of us are different; our situation more complex than it was four years ago, the last time I began serving here. God knows that! So, it is no coincidence, at least to me, that Jesus’ first words to us, indeed, God’s most frequent word throughout the Scriptures to us, is “Do not be afraid.” We need to be reminded of the frequency of this “word of God, word of life, not just today but every day.” From God’s very first interaction with us, God has known how regularly our thoughts, words, and deeds would flow from fear. Even when we deny it. Even when we give it another name. Jesus knew this. Every biblical writer knew this, which is why like every biblical story, the first words uttered by the first human in in the first story of the first interchange between God and us is: “I hid because I was afraid.” God knows that fear is the opposite of faith - of trust. God knows that we need to be constantly reminded, in Jesus’ words, that it is God’s “pleasure it is to give us” *everything*. For this “little flock” today, God knows that we need to recognize that our “dis-ease” – the thoughts, words, actions, and emotions – even those we hide - flow from fear. So, it doesn’t surprise me that “do not be afraid” are Jesus first words to us today.

Notice, that Jesus doesn’t simply command or order us to be fearless. Jesus grounds us by giving us the reason why fearlessness, especially in times like these, is possible: because it’s our “Father’s good pleasure to give us” *everything*, particularly the Holy Spirit, to energize our trust in God’s Promise, minimize our fear, and actualize our fearless, faith-filled living.

Yes, my friends, there’s a whole world outside these walls with all kinds of people acting from or recoiling from fear; and that world needs fearless, faithful us. And make no mistake, Jesus wants us to get into the action. “Be dressed for action,” Jesus says.

But first, we, the faithful people of Christ the King Church, need Christ to revive us, not only from our most recent losses, but from the 8 years of loss, disappointment, joy, relief, and relief and pain that went before. God knows that right now we need, in the words of every flight attendant, to put on our oxygen mask first, and then assist the more vulnerable. Thanks be to God! In Christ’s Church, the oxygen we need – the Holy Spirit - always drops and flows into us through the Good News we splash ourselves with; the Good News we hear; and the Good News we eat at this table. So, breathe! Then “dress for action;” organizing Jesus’ way, grounded, not on fear and control, but on faith active in love. Organize.

How often do we hear that “Jesus did not create “organized religion?” That’s true.

In Mark, Luke, and John, Jesus has nothing to say about organizing “the Church;” and prolific Paul’s writings on this are confused at best and often contradictory. But there are two places in Matthew’s Gospel where Jesus provides two basic, faith-based, fearless organizing principles, both of which we often ignore and one of which we seldom hear.

The first is in Matthew 18 and even appears in our church constitution. Based on forgiveness, it is Jesus’ recommended process for being church together.

The second is Matthew 20: 24-28. Here Jesus describes, not only *how* to organize and lead, but how *not* to organize and lead. Jesus proposes this not only for church, but for all society. Spoiler alert: both church and society ignore this. In fact, we don’t even want to hear this, so it never is appointed to be read on Sunday.

Immediately after telling disciples – for the 3rd time – of what awaits him in Jerusalem and immediately before his messianic entry, Jesus states this organizing principle to settle an apostolic argument about who will be most important when he “comes into his kingdom.” Jesus says,

“You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them.”

Like those disciples, we know this organizing principle: a pyramid.

Animals have it and we’ve perfected it; it’s based on our fear of powerlessness.

A hierarchy of domination, with the one at the top - the alpha, CEO, Queen, and often in the church, the bishop or pastor – exercising unquestioned power, with everyone else scrambling over others to get even a modicum of control.

Jesus’ judgment: “It will not be so among you.”

Jesus continues, “whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

Jesus turns the pyramid upside down. Not hierarchical, but

soteriological, organized not to control but to save and serve.

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Jesus serves at the bottom, not from a throne but a cross.

In Christ’s Church, bishops, pastors, deacons, (and church council members!) come next; served by Christ, serving, not controlling us and others; the baptized people of God are next served and serving, not clambering for control. Above Christ, clergy, council, and congregation? All the other life on this planet.

That’s how Jesus calls us to organize! That’s how Jesus calls leaders to lead! Here, at Christ’s Table, where God serves us Christ, we get both the power and the example we need to follow. Faithfully, fearlessly. So, Breathe! Inhale God’s Spirit so we can shape our organizing and our leading, not to control, but to serve.

Amandus J. Derr

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