

Wicker Park Lutheran Church
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May 12, 2024

Beloved community, please pray with me, may the words from my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable by you O Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

It's hard to believe that my time with all of you is coming to a close. These last nine months have flown by, and it has been such an honor to learn and grow in this community of faith. I have felt immense gratitude in getting to know some of you in deep ways and by getting to worship with *all* of you on Sundays.

In reflecting on these nine months, some special moments stand out to me—like the Blessing of the animal companions on St. Francis' Feast Day and mourning and grieving together on All Saints Day, as we lit candles for our loved ones who have left their earthly bodies. On two occasions, outside of this building, I joined the support team of the Night Ministry where I got to know Rob and Maria better, at their kitchen counter, as we made sandwiches together. I got to learn of the origins of their dedication and devotion to this important ministry. Afterwards, Kyle and I drove the meals out to the Pilsen area where the Night Ministry was located, and we got to meet their kind staff and the folks who generously received the meals. So much love went into the preparing of those meals, delivering them, distributing them, and then in the receiving of them.

From the abundance of this congregation, it flowed through those meals to the people whose bodies were nourished by them. It's a beautiful dance of receiving and sharing in that abounding grace one has been given by Jesus to extend to others, who then share their abundance with even more

people...This is what being in a Beloved Community of Christians can look like...All of you have shown me that in so many profound ways.

In the Gospel of John, the author is known for having a focus on how Jesus teaches the community of His disciples how to not only learn from Him, but also how to embody that communal way of loving one another amongst each other. For as Jesus said earlier in chapter 13, verse 35 “by this everyone will know you that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” A little over a month ago, we witnessed and re-enacted the washing of each other’s feet in the way Jesus displayed and taught his disciples to do with one another, for not one is greater than the other. We respected and understood when someone didn’t want to have their feet washed, for a major part of receiving and sharing in God’s abundant grace is honoring the bodily autonomy of one another.

In today’s Gospel reading, that beautiful dance of receiving and sharing in the abundant grace of God shows up in these petitions of prayer from Jesus to the Holy Parent, on behalf of the disciples. This section has been known as “the Lord’s ‘Lord’s Prayer” because the Gospel of John doesn’t actually contain the Lord’s Prayer like in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. However, this does have a series of petitions that parallel the Lord’s Prayer, and they all center around His disciples being drawn into relationship with the Holy Parent by and through Christ Jesus.

The petition of being made One as Jesus and the Holy Parent are made One is reminiscent of Paul’s letter to the Corinthians “for we are all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body,” our baptism is a physical ritual which embodies and welcomes us into a diverse and cherished Community of Christ followers. Our Thanksgiving for Baptism that we celebrated earlier allows us to continually remember that blessing...along with it being a seal of protection, much like Jesus’ plea to the Holy Parent to protect the

disciples from the “evil one.” Jesus wraps us in God’s holy protection and abundant grace, love and mercy not only as individuals, but especially as a community.

Unfortunately, The Gospel of John with its loving message of Christian community has also been exclusive to other groups, specifically listing biblical Judeans as “Jews,” who are often portrayed in opposition to Jesus.

May we

challenge these temptations of generalizations, as was explored in the Bible Studies from March and April to contextualize and reexamine scripture with love and respect for Jewish people.

The consequences of falling into the temptation of seeing the Jewish faith and people as no longer relevant, as if Christians have replaced them as God’s favored people, is not only a harmful and inappropriate perception, but it can lead us into not seeing their full humanity.

Thoughts like these cut us off from that abundant dance of receiving and sharing God’s grace, and instead they plant seeds that can yield fruits of hate. Earlier this year, antisemitic flyers were spread throughout Bucktown and then a month later more were spread throughout Lincoln Park in baggies with a substance that looked like rat poison. History has shown us how bad things can get when we exclude and dehumanize groups of people.

In this very moment, our Palestinian neighbors across the sea in Gaza are facing a humanitarian crisis from the Israeli government and army’s genocidal tactics. Our US tax dollars are funding those weapons. This is what it looks like to be lost...These are like moments where we are complicit, like Judas, in betraying our fellow humans. Judas offers us a cautionary tale of what happens when we betray the humanity in one another, for it inevitably leads to suffering and death.

A limited love that is withholding from one another, that dehumanizes one another, is not the love which Jesus has taught us, our God of multitudes pleads on behalf of all! Not only “the chosen.”

I know through conversations with folx here that some of you know that feeling of not being welcomed because of who you are, who you love, the color of your skin, your different beliefs...that in the past, church wasn't a welcoming place for you...How painful the withholding of God's love and radical welcome can be, and it leaves an open wound.

No one knows that better than Jesus, who was betrayed and hung up to die on that cross...His story doesn't end there though, and nor does our story end here either, for even the sinfulness and cruelty that hung Him up on that Cross...could not stop the resurrection of our Lord, from which burst open the gates revealing divine love that forgives and embraces all!

Despite betrayal and death, new life and hope emerges, even when mistakes are made, where we miss the mark of what God's will is asking of us, not only individually but especially collectively, God's grace will continually call us back in alignment where we are freely offered forgiveness! (growing quieter) and room at the Table for the sacred meal that Christ has continually and eternally set for us, where all truly are welcome and invited...to be sanctified in truth.

Despite our sinfulness, we have the abundance of Christ's grace to bear witness to one another as all chosen among God's people, worthy of life, dignity, and love. Our resurrection hope is in Jesus, and Jesus deeply wants us, like His disciples, to have His joy complete in ourselves! During Holy Week, that joy was so evident by all of the dedication that everyone poured into those services that culminated in the joyous moment of Easter when the flower petals were launched from the balcony down onto the congregation, and the children and babies' faces were lit up with awe and

wonder!

Throughout this Gospel, Jesus was praying about the impending changes in His life, the disciple's lives, and throughout the world, and not surprisingly we to are in a state of change: as funds are being raised in the "A Place for All" campaign to change this building to become ADA accessible, for myself and Vicar Taylor who are taking our next steps in ministry, for those who are moving into new homes, some people are recovering from surgery, others are preparing for travel this summer.

Saying goodbye to people you care about and letting go of the way things have been can be challenging, but it's also a beautiful time to appreciate the transformative power of our Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer. I will carry and *share* in my heart the abundant grace and joy that all of you in WPLC have shared with me and so many people throughout Chicago and beyond. May the grace, joy and peace of Christ be with you always. Amen.