

The Second Sunday after Pentecost  
The Reverend John H. Brock

Saturday, June 17, 2006  
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church

Ezekiel 17:22-24; 2 Corinthians 5:6-17

Grace to you and peace from God who is who was and who is to come. Amen

Since coming to Trinity three and one-half years ago I have come to realize how fortunate this congregation is to have some really *good preachers*. Now before you think I am too conceited, please note that I am not counting myself among those really good preachers. I mean, specifically Pastor Hardy and Pastor Easton. I think they are excellent preachers. I think I am pretty okay, but I think I am a better story teller than I am a preacher. I've really enjoyed the fact that because I am usually here at Saturday night on Sunday mornings I can listen to both Pastor Hardy and Pastor Easton, and I think my preaching has gotten better by listening to them. But, I realize when I have scriptures that tell a story, a story that I can tie into the scripture readings for the day like I did a couple of weeks ago when we had those readings from 1 John and I went and I tied in the movie *The DaVinci Code* and talked about some of the heresies that are. When I can do something like that I think I am pretty good, I can go forth full steam ahead.

But then there are times when we have our scripture lessons like tonight. We have this little excerpt from 2 Corinthians, and this bazaar parable from the Gospel of Mark and I'm kind of stuck. Except for all week I've had the two phrases going through my mind; one from each of those. The first is from 2 Corinthians, for we walk by faith, not by sight (5:7), and then from Mark's Gospel, the kingdom of God is as if . . . (4:26).

Now I do think that there are some common threads that both of these readings have and that common thread is that human beings are pretty messed up. Now I will say, as an aside, I get rather frustrated with people who think that scripture is nothing but stories about people of great amazing fantastic faith. The reality is that most of the folks that the Bible talks about are pretty screwed up. The Bible stories that we have can make so many of our television programs seems like children's stories. There is stuff in the Bible that will put daytime soap operas to shame. You can forget about "Survivor" or "Lost" or even "American Idol." There are stories in scripture that can keep you on the edge of your seat and might even make you blush a little couple of shades of crimson. There is a really great story about love and sex; it's a power play in 2 Samuel. It involves this young woman named Tamar, whose half brother Ammon falls in lust with her and he connives to get her alone and . . . I am sorry I am off topic, you will have to look it up yourself and read it, 2 Samuel 13.

Okay so back to Corinth. The people in Corinth aren't any different. It is a congregation that is made up both of Jewish believers and Greek converts and these people, this congregation, all of these folks who claim Christ as Lord. They're busy battling over one another, over who is a better believer. They have members pulling folk down, having them attend the neighborhood pagan bar-b-que. There's even one member of the congregation who is in an active sexual relationship with his father's wife, and apparently they're pretty

open about it because even PAUL knows about it. These folks are pretty messed up. Some of them are proud about who baptized them. Some are gloating, WE know where we're going – WE know the right way. And so Paul attempts to correct them. We walk by faith, not by sight, and what is faith? In a different letter, in a letter to the Ephesians Paul wrote, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— not the result of works, so that no one may boast. Faith, Paul says is a gift from God and we walk by faith. We walk by this gift.

Similar stuff holds true throughout the Gospel of Mark. The disciples come across as being incredibly DENSE – Jesus has to explain everything to them. (Almost kinds of sound like their Lutheran.) We almost, almost get a reference to those who think that Jesus gave some secret knowledge here in the last verse of our scripture tonight. In Mark 4:34 we heard <sup>34</sup> Jesus did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples. Those folks who think that Jesus only gave secret knowledge to people can focus on a verse like that, but they would be wrong. Jesus is simply striving to describe to his slow, small-minded disciples, or perhaps we should say slow small-minded humans, what being in God's presence is like. The kingdom of God is AS IF you went out to a field, scattered a bunch of wildflower seeds, willy-nilly, just tossed them up, laid down and went to sleep and woke up in the morning, and the entire field is FILLED with wildflowers, overnight. That is the "kingdom of God," Jesus says. The *basalia ta theo* is the Greek. *Basalia* is kingdom, *theo* is God. Now the thing is though when we hear that phrase "kingdom of God," when we hear "kingdom," we tend to think of geo-political borders. Yet in the first century "kingdom" is wherever the leader exerts influence. And so the "kingdom of God" is more than just a physical space, it's BEYOND the boundaries of Israel, it is more than just the reach of the Roman Empire, it is even to use a modern reference BEYOND the United States. The "kingdom of God" is seen thru the eyes of FAITH. Faith, that gift of faith that is given to us by the Spirit. The "kingdom of God" which is all around us. Even in those places that we really don't want to look, those seedy places in downtown Harrisburg, those scary places over in Allison Hill, and those far away places like India. Those are all part of the kingdom of God. Those are all places where we walk by faith and not by sight. And where else? We walk by faith when we walk in here. For when we gather together to worship it is AS IF God is really here. We share in this spoken word AS IF God were really speaking. We will share in the blood and the wine, the Body and Blood AS IF Jesus was truly present.

We walk by faith, not by sight AS IF the kingdom of God were Right here RIGHT NOW. So let us go forth tonight, let us go forth in faith AS IF Christ were walking right beside you. Ever present, always there, tonight and always.

Amen.