

Do You Know Where Home is?

Time after Pentecost – Lectionary 10
Affirmation of Baptism
The Reverend Glenn E. Ludwig

Sunday, June 6, 2010
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church

1 Kings 17:17-24; Psalm 30; Galatians 1:11-24; Luke 7:11-17

I have two pieces of bad news and I piece of good news. First piece of bad news, I can find no connection between the gospel lesson I just read and your affirmation of baptism today. Couldn't figure out how to get dead bodies being raised to life to fit into confirmation. Second bit of bad news, when I was growing up, when I was confirmed, I realize that was a thousand years ago in your mind, Pastor Spangler who was the pastor at Saint Paul's Lutheran Church at that time, preached a forty-five minute sermon. Here's the good news, I don't know that much. I'd like to just speak to the class for a moment. I invite you to listen.

These three pastors got together for lunch one day and they did that regularly and they would often one person would share a problem that they were having in their church, and as pastors are, we try to help one another. So this one day this pastor said, you know, we got a problem in our church and I thought we had it solved, but it didn't work. Well, what was the problem? Well, they had pigeons in the belfry, up in the tower. Hundreds of pigeons up there. And one pastor said we had that problem too. What did you do? The first pastor, she said, well we put wire up there to try to keep them out, but you know the parishioners thought that was so ugly and eventually it kind of rusted and the pigeons got in anyway and it didn't solve the problem.

I looked at the second pastor, what did you do? Well, he said, we thought it would be a good idea to stick a sound system up there so that we could blare noise through it and scare all the pigeons away. It worked. The neighbors complained, we had to stop doing that, pigeons came back. Third pastor sat there amused by all this and said, I got rid of the pigeons. What did you do? He said, I confirmed them and I haven't seen them since! (Laughter) I hope and pray that you are not going to be among those pigeons who we never see again in this church. This isn't graduation day. I am going to say that again, this isn't graduation day. It's another step in your life of faith. Began in baptism and then it was first communion and now affirming that baptism and taking your rightful place within this fellowship.

But for those of you, and I have been a pastor thirty-seven years, for those of you who will walk out of these doors and we won't see you again until you call us and want to be married. I've been a pastor thirty-seven years, did I mention that? Or we won't see you again until you have you have your own child to be baptized or confirmed or you're here because you've lost a loved one and you're here for a funeral. If that's the case and we don't see you again, I want you to remember three things. And that is what I want to share with you today.

First of all, God is with you no matter where you go or what you do. That's the promise of your baptism that you're affirming this day. And I hope you'll remember that promise for your life, because you will need to call upon God's promise to be with you when one or a series of things happen in your life. Most of you will marry. Half of you will divorce. Divorce and separation always causes pain. Some of you will start to lose loved ones. When I was Chaplain of Susquehanna University, one of the things the Dean of Students and I figured out was that college students were starting to experience losses in their family. Their grandparents were dying, in some cases their parents and it was for many of them their first significant loss, so we set up a series of support groups for those students. You will experience that at some time in your life. Some of you may deal with serious illnesses. I almost died at twenty from a staph infection. It is awful young to face your own mortality. That might be the case. Then you'll need to remember at those times that promise that God made at your baptism that the longest and shortest day that you walk on this planet, God walks with you, you are God's child. First thing to remember.

Second, prodigals are always loved, no matter where you go or what you do. You read Luke this year, didn't you, in confirmation? Alright, remember reading the story of the Prodigal Son, Luke 15. Son decides, asks his dad for his inheritance, he goes and he blows it. The most significant verse, there's two, the first in that passage is, it says when he came to himself, it's like when the light bulb goes off and you realize how stupid you've been. I know that's never happened to any of you. Countless times in my life. Countless times. He came to himself, he came back home, and what did he discover? Were the doors locked? Dad's outside watching for him, and you wonder, was he out there every day waiting for that son to come home? I think so. I can make a fairly accurate prediction today that some of you will become prodigals at some point in your life. Don't look back, look front. How many of you have been prodigals at sometime in your life? Come on, be honest. Oh, come on! Some of them are your parents. We all learn by trial and error, and all that we can do as parents and family members and teachers and pastors is to encourage you, to offer support, to point sometimes in another direction and pray that nothing serious happens to you while you're off playing prodigal and to stand there and watch for you to come, because we're going to welcome you back. Remember that you are loved.

My grandmother who lived to be ninety-eight, and that's not because she was a nice little old lady, she was a stubborn German, okay. She used to say to us grandkids whenever we would be leaving her house, remember who you are, she'd say, you're a Ludwig, and I knew what that meant. I knew that there was a certain expectation of my behavior, but I also knew that no matter whatever I did, she'd be there to welcome me back, and she did that so many times.

And the final thing I want you to remember is that this church is home for you. Any church where God's grace and God's love is preached, proclaimed, and practiced, where opportunities are for service and use your gifts, any church that does that is home for you. When you need to come back here, come back. The door will always be open. You need to remember where home is so that your experience as a prodigal in the wilderness won't overwhelm you and you feel you

have no place else to go. Home is where you're accepted no questions asked, no judgments made, where you can hear those words from God I love you and you are my child and you are always welcome here.

When I was Chaplin at Susquehanna I had a student one time who was very active in my chapel program, in fact, she became one of my deacons who worked with me, kind of like a cheap assistant pastor, anyway, we didn't pay them as much. And she was very actively involved in the chapel program. Well, two years after she started going into her junior year, her sister came to campus. Two years younger. Her sister wanted nothing to do with her older sister. Therefore, she wanted nothing to do with the Chaplin or the Chaplin's program. She was there the first two Sundays for worship, and then she realized she didn't have to be there. There's this light bulb that goes off with freshmen. Mom and dad aren't here, hmmm. I didn't see her again. I'd write her notes, encourage her. I'd heard, it's a small campus at Susquehanna, I'd heard that she was really being a prodigal, drinking a lot, running around with the wrong crowd, partying, she was getting that reputation. She was in serious danger academically of flunking out. All I could do was to keep writing notes to tell her I was there if she needed someone to talk to, come and see me. About halfway through her sophomore year I hear this knock on my door. I open it up and there she is standing and I'll never forget her words to me, she said, I've come home. She knew where home was. Oh did I mention her name, Faith.

My prayer for you this day that you'll remember that you're God's child, that this is home for you, that the Holy Spirit given to you in baptism will walk every day with you and will be a source of comfort and challenge, courage and guidance for your life. May God bless you this day and each day you walk as God's child.

Amen.