



"I'm Gonna Let It Shine! The Message"

Third Sunday After Epiphany

Saturday & Sunday, January 25 & 26, 2020

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Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church

Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Isaiah 9:1-4; Psalm 27:1, 4-9; Matthew 4:12-23

Grace and peace be to you from our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Well I started playing basketball again. You might think it's just a natural thing that I would be playing basketball, but I haven't touched a basketball in over ten years after I had a little knee trouble and I was invited by a member of our congregation into a league that he does during a week night, and I decided what the heck, and it's been a really great experience for me I have to say. Not just getting out there and playing basketball, but also making new relationships. This is a tight group of people, there any where from age 30 all the way up into their 60's. And so, it has been really neat to be a part of that and to hear their stories as they talk about the things basketball but also the relationships that they've had over the years. Some of them were friends from elementary school so they have been friends for over 40 years and some of them like me have just joined and just become a part of that. It's been really wonderful to be the new guy, just kind of sitting there and listening and hearing all of their stories about their friendship.

You know human beings are formed by stories. Think about it, when you gathered together with your friends and family like at Thanksgiving or at Christmas, those stories that you share over the tables, or those events that happened in the past that you recount over and over and over again. Like the time that the dog grabbed the turkey off of the table at Thanksgiving, or maybe it was Christmas Eve and you were coming out of the service and there was a light snow fall beginning to fall and you thought this is just perfect.

Or perhaps the case in my family, the many football games that we had at Thanksgiving or Christmas, going out in the back yard and just having fun together. These are stories that are shared by family and friends, community and church. And they give us a sense of who we are and what we can become.

Last week I had my kids visit, all four of them came to visit. We haven't been able to get all four of them together for four years. We have two of them that have been living out in the West and so their schedules were such that we were just unable to get everybody together. But this time the four of them came and three of them brought significant others. What a wonderful opportunity for a father and mother to be able to share stories of when our kids were really really young. And we did.

This week I also had a funeral on Tuesday with a member of our congregation for whom probably I've had the longest relationship of 41 years. She met me when I was 13 years old at my grandfather's cabin. And then I had a wedding on Saturday and again, families get together and they share their stories as these two families become united in a marriage.

We live life in community and when we share the stories, we become a part of the story, we influence the stories, we shape the story. And that's what I love about the Bible, these stories shape us. As we hear stories of creation, we learn about how God created us in his image and how we become participants in that creation and care takers and stewards of creation.

Or the stories in the Bible about redemption. Many times, where God sought to save his people most especially in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ who came and walked among us and shared his life, his very life with us to give salvation for the whole world.

And the stories of transformation when God's Spirit descended on God's people and they became different, they became set on fire to do the things of God and to influence nations and people.

I especially think of the stories of African American right before the Civil War. You know Saint Paul has said to us "Let the word of Christ that dwell in you richly." And it's so important to allow that to happen in our lives. African Americans before the Civil War there was one book that many slave owners didn't want them to read and that was the Bible. Because it only takes going to the second book, to the Book of Exodus where they would read about the story of Moses and how God had put it on the heart of Moses to go speak to Pharaoh and to tell him to "Let my people go." To lead them out of slavery into the freedom of the promised land. And when they read those stories, they heard those stories and those stories became a part of their own lives. They realized that Moses was alive and well in their lives, that they had a yearning for freedom and justice. That they too wanted to experience being released from slavery and to be able to go into the promised land. And they saw in those stories that the early preachers preached to them that they were part of a community, part of a family, yearning for freedom, and that God had something in store for them, a future. A future that was filled with hope and that's what they preached about, even before the Civil War. Those stories empower us and empowered them and offer us hope.

The Psalm that we read this morning the first verse is so powerful *27The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?* And those slaves heard those words, they realized who could they be afraid of because they were free even before they were free. And when we hear those words, of whom should we be afraid? Sickness, oppression, sadness, whom shall I be afraid?

God speaks to us through his word and that word has become incarnate in the person of Jesus so that you and I can see him. You and I can hold him. You and I can experience a life of faith and a knowledge of Jesus in our lives. And that word has been proclaimed in the church's worship and in the church's proclamation and witness. And God has revealed himself as someone who speaks and as he speaks, he creates, and he transforms through the message and through the gospel of Jesus. That's why it is so important that our congregation is focusing on Life Groups. These are going to be places for us to be able to share our stories, but also to be connected to the stories of scripture. And in that inter action we are going to see that we are given life and hope and love, and there have been many of you that have been part of these life groups even before they were called life groups over the years, and they have been incredibly important places of connection in a congregation that is kind of large. It's been nice to get in a smaller group to be able to do life together.

The church is formed to hear the story of God that we find in scripture and to live in a manner worthy of that story. We are formed for something, to be something, to do something, to live something. Jesus said to his disciples, "Come, follow me", he invited them into a life of worship, a life of connecting with him and with others, and a life of service to their neighbors in need. And it's the same with us! That message is the same for us, to be engaged in regular worship and prayer, to gather together with each other in big or small groups, to serve each other giving our time and our talents and our treasures for ministry.

Notice that Jesus didn't say to us, Come...and you're going to be healthy and wealthy. Or Come...and we're going to challenge Rome and we're going to start a revolution or Come...and you're going to be able to do miracles. He simply says, "come" "follow" "fish" for people, serve and share the Message.

The good news of the kingdom for you and for me is that God is in charge and there to help us do just that. He's given us a great story to live and to share and to be shaped by. And he calls us to places and peoples, that we can only imagine as we seek to offer live that's found in Jesus Christ.

And so, brothers and sisters if you hear that call, say Yes! Say Yes to participate in that story to go deep in your faith, to learn, to read, to pray, to be open, to worship, connect, and serve. Amen.

In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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