

## *Messages from the Bridge...*

Dear people of Christ,

For this Sunday, the Synod has provided a video of their staffer Pastor Karen Sease, preaching on Acts 1:6-14. This text is about Jesus' ascension into heaven. The video sermon is quite short -- just over six minutes -- and I commend it to you. (Link for video sermon: <https://vimeo.com/420643278> )



The feast of the Ascension happened for this year on this past Thursday. It marks Jesus' rising into heaven. That happens between Easter and Pentecost. You remember that Jesus told his grieving disciples that unless he went, he couldn't send the Holy Spirit to accompany and comfort them.

If you read the account in Luke 24:44-53, you'll see that at that time, Jesus "opened [the disciples'] minds to understand the Scriptures"; told them to proclaim "repentance and forgiveness of sins" to everyone; appointed them as his witnesses; and blessed them as he left. And then they were happy! The event left them full of "great joy" and a continual desire to bless God.

Here's the thing: at the Ascension the disciples know that Jesus is physically leaving them forever. And they also know that he remains with them -- through the Holy Spirit -- forever. That's the good news and something you and I, too, can always hang onto. Jesus is with us today, tomorrow, and forevermore.

May God bless you.

Pastor Ann  
(05-24-20)

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Dear people of Christ,

For your reflection today, I offer you the first part of one of my very favorite chapters of the Bible. Read Isaiah 43:1-7. And then, I suggest you read it a second time, adding your own name after every time it says "you." In other words, in the first verse, change "he who created you, O Jacob" to "he created you, Harry/Jillian or whatever your own name is.

This is one of the Bible's love letters to you personally, sent because God finds you "precious in my sight, and honored" and He "loves you." It just does not get any better than this. God would "give Egypt as a ransom" for you. That's breathtaking!

Although this is not exactly the same thing, I find the whole idea of self-sacrifice and substitution in ransom to be just about the ultimate form of love. The Mercedarian Friars were founded in Barcelona in 1218. Their "charism" or work was to substitute themselves to ransom Christians captured by Muslims. They suffered and died, of course -- and took a vow to do so! (Mercedarians are still around, working against various forms of captivity, by prayer and raising money today.)

## *Messages from the Bridge continued...*

And then there were the four navy chaplains (a rabbi, a Methodist minister, a Catholic priest, and a minister of the Reformed Church in America) who on February 3, 1943, gave up their own lifejackets to others and perished as the USAT Dorchester was sinking from a German torpedo.

If even humans are sometimes capable of such great sacrificial love for strangers, surely the full extent of God's love for us is truly unfathomable. God did demonstrate it physically once, though, from a piece of wood on a hill. Hallelujah and praise the Lord! Just as it says in Isaiah, God really does love you and me.

May God bless you.

Pastor Ann

(05-26-20)

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Dear people of Christ,

Yesterday, I suggested you read and ponder the first part of one of my favorite Bible chapters. Today, I propose you continue reading in the same book, Isaiah 43:14-25. And read it in the same way as yesterday, adding your own name after each "you."

Here, through the prophet, God tells his people that, as their response to his great love for them, they are to proclaim it to others. "You are my witnesses, says the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen." As you and I have been loved and served, we, too, are asked to serve others and to proclaim God's goodness to them.

If we sincerely ask God what witnessing and serving could look like in these strange restrictive times, surely the answer will come. God is certainly ready for that question. He says "do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old, I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?"

And then following that exhortation to witness and serve, God again reminds his people of how very much he loves and cares for them. He gives them "water in the wilderness and rivers in the desert"; doesn't burden them with religious requirements; and also, so importantly, "will not remember your sins."

So that's what's really going on in our spiritual lives. God loves us deeply; asks us to witness and serve; and then loves us some more.

May God bless you.

Pastor Ann

(05-27-20)

### **Blessing of Seeds and Soil**

The time is passing for Christ's annual blessing of seeds and soil. Obviously, we are not able to gather in church and do it there. However, here is a better alternative. Pastor Baly would be pleased to come to make a pastoral house call to your farm or garden to celebrate a private blessing with you (and your family, if desired) to ask God's blessing on your planting there. She has already done this once this season and is happy to continue. If you are interested, please call Pastor Baly directly at 484-788-0175 or call the church.

