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Our Saviour Lutheran Church  
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Easter 6

Let us pray...may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and you are most certainly our redeemer. Amen.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, as you probably know, I am not the kind of minister that preaches doom and gloom.

No matter how bad things might appear in the world, I would be hard pressed to proclaim the end of the world.

I am not like Chicken Little who went around declaring, "The sky is falling. The sky is falling."

No, I would not characterize myself as that kind of preacher.

Now, yes, I do believe we are living in the so-called end times, but we have always been living in the end times, ever since the advent of Christ.

Ever since Christ's death and resurrection, we are in the end times.

But I am not the kind of minister who goes around declaring doom and gloom.

PAUSE

Now with that said, I do long for the return of Jesus Christ.

I do yearn for Christ's return.

I desire for Christ to come and for this world to experience re-creation.

And truth be told, with each passing day as of late, I find myself that much more looking for the second advent of Christ.

But, in no way do I obsess about the end of the world.

In no way am I consumed by the possibility that this world is catastrophically spiraling out of control.

PAUSE

No, for the most part I am pretty upbeat.

No, for the most part, I treasure the absolute wonder of life.

No, for the most part I have a very optimistic view of reality.

Would I be studying for another degree, if I didn't?

Would my wife and I be making plans to send our daughter off to college in the fall, if I looked at life with sheer cynicism?

No, I tend to think of myself as quite hopeful.

And I would imagine, I would pray that all of us as Christians make our plans for the future with all the hope we can muster.

And yet...and yet, we Christians are called to have an eye out for the coming Lord.

It is a strange duality, brothers and sisters in Christ, like some strange version of the Hokey Pokey.

(SING: "Put your left foot in. Put your left foot out. Put your left foot in and you shake it all about.")

Only we have one foot in heaven, and one on earth.

It is a strange duality that we live.

On the one hand, we relish the gift that is life.

We relish in the joy that is family and friendship.

We relish being able to be with other people.

We relish as well the beauty of this world, the places we travel to, the splendor of creation.

We relish the pleasure of our pastimes—playing golf, caring for our pets, eating out, doing some gardening, reading, bowling, you name it.

On the one hand, we so very much relish this life.

But on the other hand, we as Christian people live with the expectation of Christ's return.

We live in anticipation of the new creation.

We live in hope of what will be.

Yes, we live in a strange duality, like a stray version of the Hokey Pokey dance.

And, that duality has been that much more pronounced because the many things we relish about life have been put on hold to a large extent.

And because life as we know it has been put on hold, it leads our minds to wonder about the new creation that accompanies Christ's second advent.

No, I am no doom and gloom preacher.

But instead I try to hold both the present life and God's new creation together hand and hand.

And as we can see, it can be a struggle to live in this duality.

It creates a most unusual sort of tension.

And maybe like me, you have been thinking just that much more about Christ's second coming because our world has been thrown into this most uncertain time.

We don't despise this good creation, but at the same time, with the great suffering our world is enduring presently, how can we not let our minds wander to Christ's return and that new creation?

PAUSE

Is that thinking somehow pessimistic?

Is that thinking somehow defeatist?

Are we writing off the world, writing off hope, to think about Christ's second coming?

Are we giving up if we think in this way?

Are we quitting if we think this way?

Or are we...

Are we turning to God, embracing with faith a most certain hope?

This is my dilemma as I preach this sermon in our hearing.

This the tension of which I am trying to help us make sense.

PAUSE

Now in our gospel reading Jesus says, "I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live."

And sisters and brothers in Christ, we should take those words from our Lord as encouragement.

We should receive those words of Jesus with optimism, because Jesus promises to come again in God's time.

We should hold onto those words as assurance that we are not without hope, we are not without certainty, that we are not without confidence.

And even more so, Jesus tells us in this passage that in the meantime...

...in this time between Jesus' Ascension and the time of his second coming...

In this in-between time...

In this duality we are presently living in, Jesus tells us that God provides for us.

Jesus says, "I will ask the Father and he will give you an Advocate, to be with you forever."

"This is the Spirit of truth," Jesus says.

"I will not leave you orphaned," Jesus assures us.

I will not abandon you.

I will not leave you destitute.

I will not forsake you.

I will not desert you, so says Jesus.

God will provide for you, so says Jesus.

God will give to you the Spirit of truth.

The Spirit of truth...this is the gift of God the Father in this in-between time.

This is the gift of God the Father in this duality—between the world as it is and the world as it shall be.

This is the gift of God—the Spirit of truth.

But how many of us hearken to this Spirit?

How many of us pray to this Spirit?

How many of us turn to this Spirit and beseech the Spirit for understanding in this strange time in which we live.

I know I myself am woefully neglectful of the Spirit of truth.

I know that I do not nearly enough pray to the Spirit who has been given to us to help us make sense, who has been given to us to provide some semblance of truth, in these most usual days.

I know that I do not turn to the Spirit and pray for insight, and pray for discernment about how I should live my life in this present time.

The Spirit of truth has been given to us by God the Father, in response to Jesus's request on our behalf...

The Spirit of truth has been given to us specifically for this time, the time between Christ's ascension and his second coming...

The Spirit of truth has been given to us specifically to help us navigate this duality...

...on the one hand, the life we enjoy...

...and on the other hand, the new creation we look to with anticipation.

PAUSE

Yes, what a dilemma we experience between these two poles—this life AND the life to come.

What a tension we experience, and that is why...that is why, sisters and brothers in Christ...

...that is why God the Father sent us his Spirit to help us navigate this existence.

Yes, Jesus knew that this would be a great conundrum for each individual Christian, which is why Jesus asked God the Father to give us the Spirit.

PAUSE

Now, the apostle Paul himself struggled with this conundrum, with this dilemma, this tension.

At a certain point in his letter to the church in Philippi, Paul writes these words: "For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which I prefer. I am hard pressed between the two: my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better, but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you."

Of course, Paul is writing from a little bit different slant than how we are describing the tension.

Yes, we see that there is a sweetness to this present life, even with the present difficulties associated with the coronavirus.

But there is also a glorious new creation awaiting all of us.

As an aside, it should be noted that if we should become so disillusioned with this present life, in no way should we hasten our departure from this life to that new creation.

We must be patient; we must persevere in this present life.

This is indeed the apostle Paul's conclusion.

Paul says, "I know that I will remain and continue with all of you for your progress and joy in faith."

PAUSE

Yes, sisters and brothers in Christ, I am not the kind of minister who preaches doom and gloom.

But this is what I try to preach—God’s grace in Christ Jesus.

This is message I try to convey –God’s grace in Christ Jesus still at work even in these present times.

God’s grace in Christ Jesus shines, and should shine all the brighter in us in this present time.

God’s grace should shine in us toward our neighbor.

God’s grace in Christ Jesus carries us, and through us carries others, to that coming day of the Lord’s advent.

This is the message I would seek to convey.

For God’s grace in Christ Jesus offers the abundance, the abundance of God’s love.

Christ says, “Those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and will reveal myself to them.”

God’s love is the key.

God’s love which is God’s grace in Christ Jesus...this is the key.

It is this love, God’s grace in Christ Jesus, that sustains the weary soul in the tension of this life and the life to come.

It is this love, God’s love, the grace of God in Christ Jesus...it is this love which has bestowed upon us the very gift of this life.

And, it is this love, God's love, the grace of God in Christ Jesus...it is this love that has also promised the life of the world to come.

God's love then is that in which we always live, and move, and have our very being. We are always existing in God's love.

Another way to speak of this love is as the Spirit active in us, directing us, navigating us through this duality.

This is the Spirit—God's love, God's grace in Jesus Christ—active in us.

This is the Spirit that helps us now.

This is the Spirit in which the Christian life is empowered.

God's grace in Jesus Christ is God's love, and God's love is at work in us through the Spirit.

This is the hope in the tension, in the dilemma, in the conundrum, in the duality.

This is the hope in this strange version of the Hokey Pokey.

This is the hope.

No doom and gloom. Only the grace of God in Christ Jesus.

No doom and gloom. Only the love of God in which we reside.

No doom and gloom. Only the Spirit in which we are empowered to love others.

No doom and gloom, only hope, always hope.

No doom and gloom, only hope in God. Thanks be to God. Amen.