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St. Mary the Virgin
June 19, 2016
Proper 7 C**

As you can see, I am not Fr. Ted Thompson. He's home today with a fever and bad cold so I've stepped in as the preacher. Since today is our second Sunday of using liturgical texts from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, I'm going to tell you a bit about this Lutheran Episcopal arrangement came about.

Over the course of my 45 years as a clergy person I've been involved in a

wide variety of ecumenical endeavors on the local and national level, not the least of which was my leadership role in the Lutheran-Episcopal partnership referred to as "Called to Common Mission."

As the chairman of the seven person Episcopal delegation that worked with a seven person Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) delegation to encourage joint ministry between our two denominations, I discovered that as with any marriage, there is a lot more to making an arrangement work with another party

than any of us had ever imagined in the beginning.

One of the things that it takes to make most arrangements successful between individuals or institutions is a sense of humor. There was some strong opposition in some parts of the Lutheran and Episcopal Churches to this whole cooperative venture, which has just observed its 15th anniversary.

National Public Radio humorist and Lutheran camp follower, Garrison Keillor, has made a very substantial living telling stories about the mythical but very real

small town folks who live in Lake Wobegon, Minnesota. One of the characters Mr. Keillor often speaks of is Pastor Ingqvist of the Lake Wobegon Lutheran Church. Garrison claims to have received this letter:

"Dear Mr. Keillor,

I've been wondering if you picture the Lake Wobegon Lutherans as ELCA Lutherans. If so what do you think of the new communion between the Lutheran and Episcopal churches, and thus what would the good reserved Scandinavian folks there

**in Minnesota think of their more liberal
Anglican brethren?**

Sincerely, Aidan

"Dear Aidan,

**The ELCA Lutherans of Lake
Wobegon were dead set against the new
communion, although some of them (I
name no names) have, while visiting
their fallen-away children in distant
cities, attended Episcopal churches (with
the children) and partaken of
communion. But they don't want there to
be an**

**official link that might, over the years, grow
tighter and, before you know it, you'll find
Pastor Ingqvist processing in a dress and a
rhinestone-encrusted cape preceded by
two guys twirling incense pots on chains
like they were yo-yos and go through a lot
of bowing and turning and genuflecting.**

**"And suddenly the Bible-based
sermon of 25 minutes turns into a 6-minute
homily about the beauty of flowers. And the
Sunday School takes up the infrastructure
needs of the inner cities.**

And soon you realize that your young people are a little shaky on their Bible stories and parables and can't find Jeremiah or Deuteronomy or even Ephesians without looking up the page number in the index.

"No, the Lutherans of Lake Wobegon don't care to go in that direction. Anglicanism is for when you take a vacation to England. It's like nightclubbing that way. It's for special occasions. You don't want to make a practice of it." (Taken from the Internet)

I've shared this story because we will be using this Lutheran liturgy for the first half of our summer Sundays and because the Lutheran-Episcopal venture reflects the sentiments expressed by St. Paul in this morning's reading from his Letter to the Galatians...."all [who are baptized] are to be one in Christ Jesus." As Mr. Keillor points out with such wit, there are differences between our two denominations but I would hasten to add that they are far outweighed by our shared devotion to the mission and ministry given to us by Jesus.

In this morning's gospel with the healing of the man possessed by demons Jesus, by his actions is continuing to answer the question he asked Peter, "Who do you say that I am?" that all of us must answer for ourselves. Who is Jesus for you? What would your answer be? Teacher, kind and gentle man, miracle worker, savior, social change agent.

No matter how any of us might try to describe or categorize Jesus, any of us who knows Jesus, who really encounters him in a personal and significant kind of

way, will talk about the change Jesus has made in our lives.

Whenever anyone really comes to know Jesus, really know him, something happens at a very basic level within that person. If you take Christ and his presence within you seriously, you will be changed, radically changed.

You will find your best self, the self that is bathed in the love and caring of Christ, causing you to face the problems of life differently than you did when you operated on the mores of the secular world where it is dog eat dog, where you say and do

hurtful things to those with whom you disagree. You will no longer tell yourself that personal integrity and honesty can be sacrificed because they do not serve your personal agenda.

For many people, even for regular church attenders, the thought of the kind of personal and radical change Jesus might bring into one's life is very frightening.

But the truth is that in knowing Christ we find our true selves, our true calling. Several of our youth are off on a mission trip to Kenya and I suspect that

they will find a deepening of their faith and perhaps even have some new ideas about what they want to do with their lives as they mature into adulthood.

In truly encountering Christ we are changed, healed, our lives and goals in life are reconstituted in a new and life giving way.

For Paul part of this change meant seeing that all who are baptized are one in Christ: there is no longer slave or free, male or female, Jew or Greek or any other kind of distinction we use to categorize and separate ourselves from others. One of the

outcomes of the terrible tragedy in Orlando last Saturday night is that many in this country have discovered that homophobia no longer has a place in their personal belief system nor does it belong anywhere else in our culture. One of the reasons we in the Episcopal Church now are much more open to many issues and concerns in the world is because of the Baptismal Covenant affirmed in the rite where we pledge to respect the dignity of EVERY human being.

Why has Christianity persevered for more than 2000 years? It's not because we have all subscribed to one view of the Church or one pure understanding of how the scriptures are to be interpreted or even one sense of what constitutes orthodox theology. What sustains us in our personal and corporate life is the very same thing that grasped the first disciples who followed Jesus in the dusty little country of Palestine...they discovered, as we can and do discover, is that being in Christ means we are all one people, children of a God who created all of us and loves us with a

passion that is great and tenacious and that love will not let us go. In that truth there is a great liberation and a motivation that will enable you to love others with the same love with which Jesus loves you.

Who is Jesus Christ for you? If in answering that question you can finally say he is the Lord of your life, in the changes and challenges that confront you every day, in church, at work, at home or wherever, in accepting Jesus as the center upon which your life is built

you will not lose your life....you will find it.

Amen