

Sunday, May 28, 2017 – Seventh Sunday of Easter
“In Between”

John 17: 1-11

Rev. Derek S. Klemm, Mountain View Lutheran Church, Las Vegas, NV
Structure

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

Today is an in between day. On Thursday, Ascension Day, Jesus told His disciples to go back to Jerusalem and wait there until He sent the promised Holy Spirit. Then He was taken up into heaven and they stood there watching until He was hidden from their sight by the clouds. It's hard to imagine what they were thinking or feeling at that moment when suddenly two angels appeared and asked why they were staring off into space and reassured them that Jesus would come back in the same way they had seen Him go.

So, the book of Acts reports, they went back to Jerusalem to the room where they had been staying and they waited. It would be ten days later, week from today before they would experience the events of Pentecost – we'll hear about that next week. But, they didn't know how long they'd be waiting and the ten days must have seemed like an eternity. And I'm wondering as we come together this morning what it was like while they were waiting.

We are living in an in between time, too. Jesus has ascended. He has sent the Holy Spirit as He promised. The disciples became apostles and proclaimed the message of Jesus to the ends of the earth. Your presence here today is evidence of that. Now all that's left is the promise that He will come again in the same way the disciples saw Him go. And so we wait and I wonder what it's like for you.

Jesus' prayer in our gospel gives us some hope, some courage, some direction while we wait. Let me paraphrase it – Jesus prays, “Father, it is time for me come home. My work is finished. I've done everything I came to do. I brought together this group of men and convinced them of who I am and who you are. They believe. Now I'm leaving them here and you know it's

not going to be easy for them, so protect them and bind them together by the power of my name so they can be strong and take heart.”

The message is quite simple and the answer to Jesus’ prayer is this place. God seeks to protect us so we can be strong and take heart while we wait by bringing us together, to unite us in the name of Jesus, to make us one, even as Jesus and the Father are one. It is this oneness, this unity that we need most.

A man went to visit an asylum for the criminally insane. He was a bit surprised to find that there were only three guards to take care of a hundred inmates. He said to one of the guards, "Aren't you afraid that the inmates will unite, overcome you, and escape?" The guard said, "Lunatics never unite."

Someone once defined insanity as doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results. I think we're all a little crazy because we keep trying to do this thing called life by ourselves. God wants to put us together, to connect us to each other but we seem determined to isolate ourselves more and more from each other.

That isolation is when we are most vulnerable. It is when we are all alone that our enemy the devil, who Peter describes as a lion prowling around looking for someone to devour, is the most dangerous. His most successful strategy is to divide and conquer and he has perfected it and works it continually. Lunatics never unite. And you and I insanely keep trying to do life by ourselves.

If anybody really knew the trouble you have, if they had a clue about the words you say to your spouse and your children when no one can hear, if they knew the anger that boils up inside you sometimes they wouldn't even let you in the front door. Divide and conquer. The enemy wins a little victory by shaming you into secrecy and silence and cover up.

Sickness, disease, old age, sudden and tragic loss has crept into your life. It hurts too bad to even think about it. If someone asks you'll break down in tears. If no one asks you'll they

must not care. Divide and conquer. The enemy wins a little victory by convincing you that you'll have to hide that pain until you can get it under control.

You feel overworked and unappreciated and you start looking around and feeling indignant about your co-workers' apparent lack of dedication and commitment to the job. Little comments slip out here and there that are subtle enough to claim you meant no harm but pointed enough to inflict a wound. Divide and conquer. The enemy wins a little victory as you start to despise and begrudge them.

Something's missing. There's no passion for anything. Life is drudgery. What you need is something new and exciting – a house, a car, a boat, a home entertainment system, a vacation, a lover, a high, something dangerous – except you will have to sacrifice something else to get it. Divide and conquer. The enemy wins a victory as your eyes wander and your heart lusts for one thing after another.

A little boy sits in the school cafeteria with his first grade class. It's parent's day when mom or dad come to have lunch with their child, but he's alone. His mom left them. She wrote a note: "Don't try to find me. I've gone away." He tries to explain, to hide what he doesn't even understand. "My dad sleeps in the daytime, because he works at night. He doesn't eat lunch. My mom came to eat lunch with me yesterday. She's a good mom." Hoping that if he says it enough times it would be true because nothing can replace mom.

A little girl across the table mocks him for everyone to hear, "He's lying. He's a liar. His mom's gone. She ran off with somebody else." He screams and lunges at her and then begins to cry. The lunchroom monitor marches over, frowns, and warns him if he doesn't settle down he'll have to go sit by himself at the quiet table.

And there you have it. The enemy uses us against each other to divide and conquer even in first grade. Raw pain makes us uncomfortable. It reminds us that life is not the way we want it. We don't know what to do with it so we demand that pain to stay in its own little corner

we isolate it and send it off by itself to the quiet table where it won't bother anybody else to keep it from spilling over onto other parts of life.

Dear God: that's why Jesus came. Only God can defeat this enemy who constantly seeks to divide and conquer and devour. Jesus is God made vulnerable for your sake. Jesus is God allowing Himself to be separated and isolated from the Father from all people. Jesus goes off by Himself to draw the enemy away from you, to die on a cross, alone, cut off from people, cut off from His Father.

But this is the Easter season, folks, and we are living in the Easter time of the world's history. Jesus died to destroy the power of our enemy and rose again to give us that power. Sin and death are buried with Jesus and new life is raised up in us by faith in Him. The only weapon our enemy has is his ability to deceive us into believing that you can, or that for some reason you have to do life by yourself.

Lunatics never unite. Our insanity of doing the same thing over and over, expecting different results is cured at the cross. A new and right spirit is restored in us. Forgiveness and eternal life bind us together as Easter people willing to risk caring for each other, willing to hold one another accountable when we're being foolish and stupid, willing to wait for the Lord, to be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord.

There is no magic pill. There is only the church - you and me and the person next to you. That's what Jesus created to hold us together while we wait. Through this word, through that water in the entryway, through the bread and wine the Holy Spirit keeps coming to start fresh with us. There are a lot of great things happening here, but you know what, Mountain View hasn't even begun to discover all that God is capable of doing. In Jesus' name, Amen