

The Sixth Sunday of Easter
May 20 & 21, 2006
Homily by Rev Timothy A Leitzke

“Faith is the victory that conquers the cosmos.” I don’t know about you, but I get the feeling that the cosmos is getting the better of me. The air is 95% tree pollen. I’m tired. I’m sick. The problems keep on mounting. I can’t write the sermon because I have to visit shut-ins. I can’t visit the shut-ins because I have to fix the copier. I can’t fix the copier because I overslept and got here late. I overslept because I was up late worrying about the sermon. I get the feeling that the cosmos is getting the better of me. I need faith, and it needs to be honest. It can’t deny my problems; I’ll know it’s phony. It can’t be beyond my grasp; if it isn’t real it isn’t of any use. I need faith to come to me in a physical form, in people and in places. God knows, I cannot have faith just by trying. It never ceases to amaze me how God throws faith into my life.

Faith became incarnate for me once when I visited a congregation I’d never known. I was greeted by a NO PARKING sign on the parking lot and the door vaguely marked as the ENTRANCE was clearly not the door to the sanctuary. I sought the men’s room but saw only rooms marked STAFF LAVATORIES. I was handed a dense worship bulletin and a worship booklet and had to learn my way through them but was doing okay, and then they collected the offering. I was just visiting; I had no offering. The plate came to me and I passed it to the next person, and an old woman in the pew behind me whispered, loudly enough to be heard in

a sawmill, “Did that young man put anything in the plate? I don’t think he did!”

That was a year ago, and that was how I spent my first day at Holy Trinity ☺

I was in disguise that day so people did not know this was potentially their new pastor. I cut them some slack, but why did I come back? Maybe it was hearing the faith statements of those affirming their baptisms. Maybe it was the fact that there were thriving ministries here already. Maybe it was the fact that I could see and feel both the room and the desire to do even more. And, yeah, maybe it had a *little* something to do with Pastor Mary responding to my offering story by saying, “Oh, thank God they weren’t members. You won’t have to see them again!” It was those things, but it was more than those things. I could feel the Spirit alive here, calling me here. There was faith here, and faith conquers the world. I met faith in six total strangers who were on my call committee and shared their stories openly. I met faith in Pastor Mary, whose total prior contact with me was my telling her that now was not a good time for a phone call because I was finishing a seminary project. I met faith in members of the congregational council—and let me tell you, congregational councils are often the *last* place you find faith! There was faith here, and faith conquers the world.

Our faith, our confession, is a little wacky. It glorifies a weakling. It worships a God who suffers. Its focus is a man who failed. It is decidedly *not* of this world. This world has no time for the weak and tired. This world worships power and glory. This world sees a failure and ridicules him or her. This world even warps our faith. It sees the suffering Jesus and tells us to shut up and suffer

like he did. It sees the crucified Christ and assumes that God has some kind of bloodlust. It pretends that Jesus' failures weren't failures by this world's standards, even though crucifixion was not exactly a mark of success in life. The world offers a hollow mockery of our faith. It's because the world cannot understand our faith.

Friends of Christ our faith is in Jesus the Christ, "the one who came through water and blood." His struggles, his failures, and all the things that made him human were real. If they were not, they would be of no use to us. Our faith is more than saying that Jesus was like you and I. Our faith is that God is revealed in Jesus the Christ. Doesn't the world seem to get the better of Jesus? God loses. God stops being strong and right and perfect and wise, but it's not because the world wins. No, it's because all God wants to do is love us, and nothing will stand in God's way. The blood that flows from Christ's side is the forgiveness of our sins. The living water that flows from Christ's side is the Holy Spirit pouring into us at that moment of Christ's death. And just when it looks like that's all she wrote God raises Jesus from the dead. The God who steps into our broken world raises the crucified Christ into eternal life. There is something brutally honest about our faith, and that's what's so refreshing about it. The God who gives up everything gives us everything. We have the Spirit. We have life. We have the promise of life eternal. We have faith. Where is faith incarnate today? Where do we experience God?

In faith we have followed the command to love our neighbors, caring for our brothers and sisters in Christ. In faith we have fed the hungry and helped the sick. In faith we welcome everyone who comes to our door. In faith we jam the building with Sunday School children, and offer the space to pre-school children during the week. In faith we offer meeting space for AA groups. In faith we welcome newcomers. In faith we worship together and drink the living water that flows from Christ. In faith we see a broken world and we answer the Holy Spirit's call to do God's repair work on creation.

We do these things in faith because God has given us the faith to do them. God loved us even though God had no reason to love us. We do these things in faith as our loving response to God's love, and our faithful response to God's faith. Where else could we go? What else could we do? Friends of Christ, you never know when you are faith incarnate for someone else. You never know when God is going to be revealed in you. You could be the usher who identifies a newcomer and offers a warm welcome and some reassurance. You could be the dutiful member who stocks the food pantry that feeds a hungry family. You could be the voice of the Gospel for someone who needs to hear it today. Sometimes this world seems like it's getting the better of us, but the faith of Christ is alive here and it takes on a physical form in each of us. The faith of Christ comes to you through others and it comes to others through you, and the faith of Christ conquers this world. Amen