

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
May 2, 2021

Greetings brothers and sisters in Christ.

HE IS RISEN!! HE IS RISEN INDEED!! ALLELUIA!!

OUTSIDE in-person worship on the parking lot, tomorrow May 2nd at 10:30 a.m.. Masks and social distancing will be required. Bring your lawn chair. When you arrive, you will be directed to park your car in a designated space. After you park your car, place your lawn chair where you would like to sit. Then, go to the table to pick up a bulletin, a communion kit (choice of grape juice or wine) and place your offering in the plate.

We are excited about gathering in-person again and we ask you to be considerate of other's needs at this time. This transition back to being together may cause a great deal of anxiety for some people. So, although you may be fully vaccinated and/or may be comfortable being a little more lax with the CDC guidelines; there will be those there on Sunday morning that are not. So, please for the sake of others who are working through their anxiety adhere to CDC guidelines of wearing your mask properly (with your nose covered), maintain the 6 ft separation from others who are not family members, and do not engage in any physical contact (hand-shaking or hugs). We want this outside sanctuary to be a place where all people who choose to attend feel they can participate safely.

If Outside worship is canceled due to the weather, we will join for worship on Zoom. The cancelation will be made by 7:00 p.m. on Saturday and will be posted on channel 69 News. If you do not have access to 69 news, contact me and I will have someone notify you by phone.

The witness committee will be selling pinwheels to benefit Family Promise in May. This is a partnership with Thrivent Financial. We have purchased the pinwheels with a grant from Thrivent and will be selling them for \$2.00. All the proceeds will be donated to the ministry of Family Promise, which provides housing for those who are homeless.

Insurance Renewal - Help Needed – our insurance policy needs to be updated and we are looking for someone/s with some knowledge and/or experience to help the Council review proposals and make a recommendation for a new policy. Contact Pastor Denise or Lynn Shollenberger, if you would be willing to help.

Eugene Burkhardt Scholarship – The Eugene Burkhardt Scholarship Fund has been set up to provide financial assistance to members of Good Shepherd ELC who are graduating from high school and pursuing higher education. To request an application, email or text Pastor Denise. Completed applications are to be returned to Pastor Denise on or before May 14th.

If you have prayer requests, please send them to me so that I can include them in my weekly newsletters.

Yours in Christ,

Pastor Denise

Home Phone 610-750-6432

Cell/Text Phone 610-858-8187

Acts 15:1-18

A reading from the 15th chapter of Acts beginning at the first verse.

15 ¹⁻² It wasn't long before some Jews showed up from Judea insisting that everyone be circumcised: "If you're not circumcised in the Mosaic fashion, you can't be saved." Paul and Barnabas were up on their feet at once in fierce protest. The church decided to resolve the matter by sending Paul, Barnabas, and a few others to put it before the apostles and leaders in Jerusalem.

³ After they were sent off and on their way, they told everyone they met as they traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria about the breakthrough to the non-Jewish outsiders. Everyone who heard the news cheered—it was terrific news!

⁴⁻⁵ When they got to Jerusalem, Paul and Barnabas were graciously received by the whole church, including the apostles and leaders. They reported on their recent journey and how God had used

them to open things up to the outsiders.

Some Pharisees stood up to say their piece. They had become believers, but continued to hold to the hard party line of the Pharisees. "You have to circumcise the pagan converts," they said. "You must make them keep the Law of Moses."

⁶⁻⁹ The apostles and leaders called a special meeting to consider the matter. The arguments went on and on, back and forth, getting more and more heated.

Then Peter took the floor: "Friends, you well know that from early on God made it quite plain that he wanted the pagans to hear the Message of this good news and embrace it—and not in any secondhand or roundabout way, but firsthand, straight from my mouth. And God, who can't be fooled by any pretense on our part but always knows a person's thoughts, gave

them the Holy Spirit exactly as he gave him to us. He treated the outsiders exactly as he treated us, beginning at the very center of who they were and working from that center outward, cleaning up their lives as they trusted and believed him.

¹⁰⁻¹¹ “So why are you now trying to out-god God, loading these new believers down with rules that crushed our ancestors and crushed us, too? Don’t we believe that we are saved because the Master Jesus amazingly and out of sheer generosity moved to save us just as he did those from beyond our nation? So, what are we arguing about?”

¹²⁻¹³ There was dead silence. No one said a word. With the room quiet, Barnabas and Paul reported matter-of-factly on the miracles and wonders God had done among the other nations through their

ministry. The silence deepened; you could hear a pin drop.

¹³⁻¹⁸ James broke the silence.

“Friends, listen. Simeon has told us the story of how God at the very outset made sure that racial outsiders were included. This is in perfect agreement with the words of the prophets:

After this, I’m coming back;

I’ll rebuild David’s ruined house;

I’ll put all the pieces together again;

I’ll make it look like new

So outsiders who seek will find,

so they’ll have a place to come to,

All the pagan peoples

included in what I’m doing.

“God said it and now he’s doing it.

It’s no afterthought; he’s always known he would do this.

L: The word of the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

Sermon

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father
and Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. AMEN.

Lord of all,
In Jesus you have made us all
sisters and brothers in Christ.
There is no distinction between
Gentile and Jew. There is no
separation that can remove any
from fellowship in Christ's
community. Blind us to our
differences so that in unity
we may proclaim your truth to
all, for the sake of Jesus Christ
in whom there is harmony and
peace. Amen.

The Spirit of the Lord is on the
move.

Last week we heard how the
Spirit lead Philip to the road
from Jerusalem to Gaza where
he met up with the Ethiopian
eunuch with whom he read and
interpreted Scripture from the

book of Isaiah, shared the good
news of what God had done for
us through the life, death and
resurrection of God's beloved Son
Jesus, baptized the eunuch in
the name of Jesus and then
watched as the eunuch filled
with joy and empowered by the
Holy Spirit went on his way to
share the good news of Jesus
Christ with his people in
Ethiopia.

And today we hear another story
about how the Spirit is on the
move creating faithful followers
of Jesus with people who are not
the descendants of Abraham.
And it seems things have gotten
out of control.

Kind of like what has happened
to our gardens here at the
church. As it seems that until

the gardeners arrived yesterday morning, new plants and bushes and even trees are spouting up everywhere they find a little dirt to grab hold of. There seems to be no boundaries, as new sprouts appeared in cracks in the walkways, underneath other bushes, and in spots where you just couldn't imagine they would take hold, let alone thrive.

And that seems to be how it was with the early church as the word of what the God of Israel had done for us through his beloved son Jesus spread. Believers seemed to be spouting up everywhere.

And what was becoming evident was that the way they had always done things was not always in line with what the Spirit was doing.

In the original covenant between the God of Israel and Father Abraham, God promised three things: that God would make of a great nation of Abraham's

descendants, that God would lead them to the land that would be their homeland, and that they would be blessed so that through them all people would be blessed.

The sign that the descendants of Abraham entered into this covenant with the God of Israel was with the sacrificial act of circumcision. And this rite of circumcision over the generations became not just a sign of their loyalty to God and their commitment to the covenant, but circumcision became a sacred sign of their identity as having been chosen as children of the God.

So, as those who were not descendants of Abraham have also be names and claimed as children of God, this time through the rite of baptism.

The question arose as to whether it was necessary for all male believers to be circumcised to be a bona fide children of God. And that brings us to this morning's

text where there is a very heated meeting of the leadership in Jerusalem to wrestle with the requirement of circumcision for all the new believers.

There were those who argued that it was important for this growing and expanding faith community to be rooted in the Mosaic law, of which the practice of circumcision was a part.

But then Peter spoke and reminded them how it was not just the descendants of Abraham that God had filled with the Holy Spirit and if God did not require them to be circumcised to receive the Holy Spirit, who were they to put additional requirements on the people who had come to believe not just in the God of their forefathers, but had also come to believe in what the God of their forefathers had done for them through the faithfulness and obedience of Jesus.

Then Paul and Barnabus spoke of the many miracles and

wonders God had done among the other nations through their ministry.

And then James ended the defense against the requirement of circumcision for those who were not the descendants of Abraham by saying: “Friends, listen. Simeon has told us the story of how God at the very outset made sure that racial outsiders were included. This (that is what we are proposing with regard to not requiring the Gentiles to be circumcised) is in perfect agreement with the words of the prophets:

Such as these:

After this, I’m coming back;

I’ll rebuild David’s ruined house;

I’ll put all the pieces together again;

I’ll make it look like new
So outsiders who seek will find,
so they’ll have a place to come to,

All the pagan peoples will be included in what I’m doing.

James ends his argument by saying - "God said it and now he's doing it. It's no afterthought; he's always known he would do this.

The Spirit was on the move and now the practices and rituals of the descendants of Abraham, even those as near and dear to them as the sacred rite of circumcision had taken on new meaning. For circumcision would no longer be the mark of the children named and claimed by God.

Instead, a new rite and a new mark of their identity emerged that bond this community of believers in the God of Israel together. It was not an outward sign, but it was their belief in God and what God had done for them through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus that would now bring them together and bound them together as a faith community.

Today as we come together for the first time in over a year, and it is so very good to be together again. But, let us not forget that it is not this sacred place, it is not our traditions or our practices and it is also not our fellow Christians whom we gather with this morning where our identity is rooted.

Our Christian identity is grounded in our belief in the one God, the God of Israel and our identity is grounded in our belief in what our one God has done for us through the life, the death and the resurrection of Jesus and our identity is grounded in our belief that God's Spirit is on the move in us, through us and among us. So that one day God's covenant with Abraham will be fulfilled and ALL people will be blessed.

AMEN

Blessing

May
The love of God,
The light of Christ,
And the joy of the Holy Spirit
Abide with you on this day
and forever more.

AMEN