

June 9, 2024 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
Rev. Jen Nagel, University Lutheran Church of Hope

2 Corinthians 4:13—5:1, Psalm 138  
Mark 3:20-35

**Grace and peace to you, beloved ones of Christ Jesus. Amen.**

**That gospel, did you hear it?**

Not exactly the comfort and care for which we might be yearning, especially this morning.

**We're just three chapters into Mark's rendition.**

Jesus has announced that the reign of God is coming.

He's called a few disciples, cast out some demons, healed people.

He's broken the sabbath rules, or at least some people's interpretation of the rules.

Perhaps most overarching: every way he turns, **Jesus opts for liberation**, and for that they say he is...

Out of his mind. Possessed by demons.

**Our gospel this morning, as enigmatic and challenging as it is,**

gets into the mucky realities of following Jesus:

It questions our alliances, what is family?

It presses us to think about good and evil, about forgiveness.

It invites us to weigh what is life giving.

It demands that we push back against the Strong Man, the oppressive systems.

all in the spirit of practicing Jesus' way of liberation, of inclusion and grace.

Perhaps what I notice the most is this: there is an un-done-ness to this story, a lack of resolution.

**I feel some of this same un-done-ness, this lack of resolution, myself.**

Together we've shared nearly 9 years of ministry.

These last days I've been making some pretty good notes and

trying my best to pass along what I can to Pastor Maria, our staff, our leaders,

and to the Interim Pastor who will join you beginning on June 18<sup>th</sup>.

All that, and things still feel undone.

This is not an ideal time to be stepping out—we're in the middle of big projects,

there's more ministry we could do together, more we had planned to do together.

And yet as we moved into and through the Minneapolis Area Synod's bishop election process,  
the Holy Spirit had her way.

**Today I stand before you excited about** this new invitation to serve as your bishop,

to figure out how to be a pastor to a larger group of churches and church leaders,

to work alongside lay leaders ,

like our Synod Vice President Felecia Boone who is with us this morning.

**AND**, at the very same time, I stand before you grieving, grieving hard,

often teary-eyed as we share memories and reflections,

as we say thank yous and good byes and I love yous.

You have invited me into precious, painful, vulnerable spaces—

some of these are public like baptizing and burying, and sharing Jesus' meal at the holy table,

others are deeply personal, private conversations, words of assurance.

I've realized that the best I can do is hold all of this:

the beginnings, the endings, the precious years, the tears.

And to do it with some healthy transparency, for I see you doing the same. Thank you.

**Over these years I've found it so important to keep our heads and hearts connected,**  
would you take a breath, a deep breath, and let it go?  
And again, a big breath, and let it go.

**Remember David Letterman?** He was famous for his Top Ten Lists on the Late Show?  
Roll with me here, friends.

In that spirit, here's my **Top 10 List of What I Value About These Years Together.**

**#10. Death and Resurrection.**

What a privilege to spend my days hearing your stories and  
witnessing how God is making life in places of death and grief.

**#9. Porous Walls.**

Early on, one of you reminded me that we are UNIVERSITY Lutheran Church of Hope.  
Context matters. Neighbors matter. Being right where we are matters.  
As we sought to listen to the Spirit and make our walls porous, things happened...  
Partnerships formed, stories were shared, we showed up and kept vigil in meaningful ways,  
the bread oven was built, the men's gymnastics team  
(which for some seasons lived just across 13<sup>th</sup> Avenue)  
ventured across the street, red solo cups in hand, and walls became more porous.

**#8. Risking for Justice. Being Transformed by Justice.**

Our congregation has a long history of justice making,  
In late 2016 and the winter of 2017, you made the decision to trust your faith,  
to get more involved in matters of immigration.  
Our leaders listened hard and together we made a decision to become a Sanctuary Congregation.  
This was risky. This is risky.  
Our community widened. Our understanding deepened. My heart broke and grew ten-fold.  
I pray this transformation will shape you as you keep grappling with the legacy of white supremacy.

**#7. Holy Experiment.**

We began using this phrase during COVID and then as we ventured back together.  
Remember those days? All an experiment, making mistakes, changing course, trying again.  
There is something really good about understanding our life together as a Holy Experimenting.  
It's freeing, it's participatory, we can't do it all just right, and that is fine, that's holy, that's healthy.  
We're free to wonder, to notice, to live and worship with some imagination and creativity.

**#6. Complex world. Thoughtful church.**

I have found this tag line so compelling.  
In some wonderfully helpful ways it's made a space, a container,  
for the honest complexity that we and our world are experiencing.  
It invites us to engage the complexity as a faithful, praying community.

**#5. Welcoming and letting go.**

We are gathered in Christ's name and sent out in the Spirit's power.  
Baptizing and welcoming,  
sharing a life with campus ministry students,  
praying Godspeed as the seasons change,  
mourning loved ones,  
holding one another with tender care, and with a gentle openness.

**#4. Creativity and Abundance.**

This is a congregation of tremendous abundance.  
I noticed that from the start when I fell in love with the call committee back in the winter of 2015,  
sitting around the conference room table. .  
You are gifted and hardworking leaders, faithful followers, a talented staff,  
doers and thinkers and artists.  
You are full of strong beliefs and deep passion  
with a willingness to work together for something good.  
I've learned so much walking with you as together we follow Jesus.  
I don't take this abundance for granted. Thank you.

**#3. We are held by the prayers of many.**

I've been so moved these last weeks to receive notes and cards from all over the place:  
from our close neighbors like Grace University Lutheran Church, on the other side of the campus,  
and from members of congregations and church leaders across the ELCA,  
and in fact from other denominations, too.  
We know this is a challenging time. We are here for you.  
They say things like: "We're praying for your congregation."

**#2. We are more than ourselves.**

When we gather, we join the saints who have gone before us, and the whole creation.  
As we break bread at the edgeless table, I know that Winnie Nyhus and Susan Carlson,  
Lyle Lutz and Chris Zann and a whole host of others of you,  
are with us on Zoom and YouTube.  
We are more than ourselves.

**#1 You are beloved of God.**

God loves you, and so do I.  
You are enough. Grace will hold you. Always and forever, grace will hold you.

**Whew. Take a deep breath. I need one.**

So there you have it, my Top 10 List of What I Value About These Years Together.

**As I look back over these years** and this list, I notice again how counter-cultural it is to be community.

At our best, we love people who aren't our family.  
We dare pray for our enemies and practice forgiveness.  
When the world is doing its darnedest to keep us on the hamster wheel,  
we opt for liberation, we trust enough to rest,  
We push against the Strong Man of our time.  
And what might people call us? Oh, you know: Out of our minds.  
Maybe that's okay, for we're in the company of Jesus.

**This leave taking, my friends.... is hard, very hard AND we will move through it.**

Pastor Maria and the Interim Pastor, our congregation's leaders, and the staff,  
and eventually another settled pastor, they will walk with you.

**God's steadfast love will keep you**

**I love you, and I love this congregation.**

Thank you for loving me, and my family so well.  
Thank you for your prayers, and for your generous and open hearts. .  
It has truly been a privilege to be your pastor and to be part of this faithful community.

**We close today in prayer....**

O God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending  
by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown.

Give us faith to go out with courage, not knowing where we go,  
but only that your love is leading us, and your hand is supporting us.  
Through Jesus Christ. Amen.