

“Declaring the Father”

Contrary to popular belief, this congregation was not established by the founding fathers of the congregation – and each and every pastor that has served here over the years, was called by God to serve you in this place.

As our reading from the Acts of the Apostles shows us – it is the Lord’s Church. He is the One who gathers His sheep, and gives them a shepherd to care for them. He says that it is necessary that the Office of the Holy Ministry be filled – because through that divinely instituted office, the Lord Himself is at work, “for you.”

In other places in the Acts of the Apostles, we also see that the Lord determines where His congregations of believers will be. The Apostle Paul, in his missionary journeys, for instance – was forbidden from preaching in Asia, in Mysia and Bithynia, to establish congregations there – for “the Spirit of Jesus did not allow” Paul and his fellow workers to go there. Instead, he was sent to Macedonia to preach the Gospel. (Acts 16:6-10)

Thanks be to God that “the Spirit of Jesus” preached the Gospel here in days of old – that He might gather a congregation of believers, and preserve us to this very day.

Not only does the Lord’s work of establishing congregations often go unnoticed – but also the truth that He continues to be present to do His work in the midst of us. Jesus and the Holy Spirit continue to preach and administer the sacraments in this congregation of believers every week.

That’s why, in our Gospel reading, Jesus says (regarding the Father) – “I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.”

With His Word, Jesus answers the big questions often asked by mankind – “Where is God?” and “What is His attitude towards me?” When the evil of the world raises its ugly head – when our sins, and the sins perpetrated towards us wound us deeply – the answers to these questions become all the more important to us.

Dearly beloved, as we have been taught during these Lenten and Easter seasons – only Jesus can remove our deadly sin. Only Jesus can raise our mortal and decaying flesh. Only He can free us from the torments of hell, and deliver us from the wickedness that surrounds us.

So today, Jesus declares the Father's love to you, and promises – "I will continue to make it known." In other words, Jesus continues to be at work in the midst of us – doing the very things that the Bible reveals Him doing when He visibly walked this earth – driving out demons, healing the sick, feeding the hungry, and raising the dead – continuing to declare the Father's love to you.

God, in His Word, clearly reveals that all mankind is born in sin – that we "were dead in our trespasses and sins" and that we followed the devil." (Eph. 2:1-2). Jesus, however, cast out the devil and made way for the Holy Spirit when He baptized you – revealing that you are the Father's beloved child.

He continues to declare the Father's love for you in the preaching of His Word. His preaching, His Gospel – chiefly, that He has redeemed you from all sin – is His healing and raising of the dead. "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" is the refrain of those who hear and believe His Word of life.

With His Supper, Jesus gives you food from the Tree of Life which is for "the healing of the nations." (Rev. 22:2). The Holy Spirit brings paradise to you as you eat the fruit of the cross – the very body and blood of Jesus – filling you with immortality.

As Jesus gathers His flock here at Immanuel, throughout the liturgy, He is declaring the Father's name to you, and His love for you. He exhorts God's children to Confess their sins – and He Absolves them.

He leads us (who have been made holy and righteous by His forgiveness) into the Father's presence – to sing a Hymn of Praise. He collects your concerns and needs and gives them to the Father as He prays with you, and for you, in the Collect.

The readings of Holy Scripture are the proclamation of God's Word – which He explains to you, and applies to you, in the Sermon. He who is “the way and the truth and the life” leads you to confess these truths of God in the Creed. He intercedes for you and for the whole world in the Prayer of the Church – and He presents your Offerings to the Father for the spread of the Gospel.

Then He calls you to sit at Table with Him. “Come,” He says. “Let the one who is thirsty come.” “Come, all you who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest.” He who has taught you to Pray, answers your petitions for forgiveness, holiness, and all the needs of body and soul – by giving you His very own Body and Blood.

And before you leave this gathering – He once again puts the Name of the Triune God upon you – blessing you by announcing that He goes with you back out into the world – to your vocations, to the places He has put you, so that in your words and by your hands and with your time, He might also declare to the world the name of the Father and His love for all mankind.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, you are not without consolation in this world – for Jesus and the Holy Spirit are with you – they are at work in you, through you, and for you. Such is the Father's love for you – that He sends His Son and the Holy Spirit to you – so that you may know and believe in Jesus your Savior.

Your Father is at work in this world – in the Son and through the Holy Spirit – so that you may be certain that your Father loves you. In Jesus you see His love – the sacrifice that He makes so that He may not lose you eternally – His grace and forgiveness that overcomes all that seeks to divorce you from Him.

Today, gathered once again by the Holy Spirit to receive the Divine Service of Jesus – we rejoice in the forgiveness, life and salvation that He brings – that we may know and live in the love of our Father, now and forevermore. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.