

American Lutheran Church of Sun City
The Second Sunday of Easter
April 6 – April 7, 2024
Rev. Jacqui Pagel

Acts 4:32-35

1 John 1:1-2:2

John 20:19-31

Grace & Peace to you sisters and brothers,

Let us pray,

Hello American Lutheran Church. Thank you for having me.

Thank you, Pastor Scott, for letting me come and introduce myself to your community. Greetings from Bishop Deborah Hutterer. I get to work with her in the office of the Bishop as your Associate to the Bishop for Candidacy and Faith Formation.

That means that I get to come out and say “thank you” to congregations like yours that are building leaders for our church and sending good people like James Gerber to candidacy and helping the ELCA be a great place to worship and praise God. I get to come out and tell you a little bit about the office of the bishop, some of the awesome people there doing awesome stuff to help us be church together. The Other A2B's in the office Pr. Dan Potaznick helping us come up with the ways to sustain the way we do church, our Bishops associate for Generosity and Pr. Jim Dew

our Churchwide Director of Evangelical Mission and Bishop associate for Viability, helping us recognize the ways that the church can be viable, today and tomorrow.

Your Office of the Bishop team is filled with people that are doing the things that your pastor doesn't get to do because he is busy taking care of you. We are making sure we have connections with each expression of our church. You all know what is going on with the church across the country. How did that earthquake on Friday, on the East coast affect our brothers and sisters? What is going on with congregations in other parts of our synod Las Vegas, Tucson, Prescott, Utah? And how are the people here living into their faith and helping the church be the church we more than need to be? The church we want to be.

One of the best ways to know what is going on is to get the Grand Canyon Synod newsletter that comes out every Friday morning into your email at 8:00 am. Brian Flatgard our director of communications does a great job of keeping us updated. Just go to the synod website and sign up. There are about 15 of us between part-time and full-time staff doing our best to be sure that the 90 worshipping sites across all of AZ, southern Nevada, mostly Las Vegas, and New Promise Lutheran in St. George UT are doing what we can to be church together and the best expression of

Lutheran in this part of the country. Part of that is me getting to bring you all the good news for the day.

This is the traditional text after Easter. For those of you that always come to church surely you have heard every take in this, that there is. How many times have you said Thank God for Thomas, yes, I am just like him, I too need to see Jesus then I will believe. Or thank God for Thomas because now I know who I can pray for since I already know Jesus is real. I can pray for all those people that doubt. Thomas is always a good way to go with this text. As a preacher we are confident that most of the people that are listening to us, or at least at church, have had doubt at some time in their life, even if just for a minute. Of course, I'm going to talk about Thomas this morning I already have. This text is so much more.

There are good reasons that the preparers of our lectionary pick it to come up every year instead of every third year like many of the pericopes we here. This text is rich and filled with so many aspects of faith to highlight.

The good news for you today is that we have seen him. Vs 25 of the gospel text. For those of you who have not heard me preach prior to today, right now. I am a popcorn preacher. I like to keep it

simple. Let you know where I get the whole point of my sermon from. Encourage you read the passage for yourself and say enough things that sound funny that you pick them out like a handful of popcorn and just enjoy the show. For today's message I want you to hear we have seen Him and be comforted with that thought. Seeing Jesus matters.

Do you all realize that we have lost 3 -4 generations of people from the church? There are many people who have no idea who Jesus is. We are quickly approaching a time when there are more non-believers in the United States than people who say they believe in God. People will say they believe in God or may say the Universe as an actor, but they don't go to church or have any specific religion.

What happened that people could ask me, "is Lutheran Christian?" Not only is Lutheran Christian, but I am also a pastor of the Lutheran church. The number of times people don't want to believe that. People have no idea what is happening in our churches these days. Sometimes it seems like we barely know what is happening in our own churches. There is a disconnect between seeing Jesus and being religious. Sometime in the life of America people stopped professing their faith and started being religious. We got to go back or go way forward. We must get better

about letting other people know that we have seen Jesus. We need to be sure people know that we believe and what we believe.

I am very fortunate because I get to visit many different churches across the Grand Canyon synod and in other parts of our country. Most of our churches are the same, they are much like you all here now. 60-100 people descended from places like, Germany, Norway, and Sweden. Not many young people, no babies and they sang the same songs. You get to decide if that is good or bad. You get to decide if you want it to be different. You get to determine does this church close with you, or does it live on for many more generations? Will future generations know what it is to be Christian, to be Lutheran?

Who will get to say after you, "they have seen Jesus?" What do your grandchildren say about him? Do your children know your story and have any idea why you go to church every Sunday? When they read your will, will they understand why you are leaving so much money to the church? Will they say, "the church doesn't need that much, we will give~' mom will never know, she's dead now?" I get to say the stuff your pastor can't. Yes, the church needs your money, the pastors deserve your money. And you need to tell the people you love when and where you have seen Jesus.

How do you know that He is alive? How do you know that God is real?

When have you felt the Holy Spirit blow. We all have our stories. We all believe. That is why we are here. That is why we tithe. That is why we say grace before a meal, and we run up here to get communion. We have Jesus and we know that Jesus makes a difference. We have Jesus, we have salvation. There is something more than our own ability. It is not about our retirement account. It is not about eating healthily and drinking plenty of water. Who cares who you married and what side of the tracks you grew up on. It is a matter of reading scripture, confessing your sin, repenting and loving your neighbor as yourself.

Practice on yourself. Read your bible, sing the old, old hymns. Tell your friend again about that time you thought you were going to die, but your Jesus was there. Remind your spouse that you know Jesus is there because you have a love affair that's lasted a lifetime and you only made it because of Jesus. Write a note to your pastor and tell him you have seen Jesus because Christmas eve service was so beautiful.

Where have you seen Jesus. How do you know? How do you know that coming to church every Sunday, putting on deodorant, and

shouting he has risen matters? Tell somebody, be sure you know it for yourself. Tell yourself the stories. Ask your children, do they know? The person sitting next to you, do they know you know? Yes, he has risen, but until you tell me in your own words, I won't believe it.

Say what you can, when you can, and be sure that all those who you think love you, know that you know, and have seen Him.

My Lord and my God we have seen Him. AMEN!