

**American Lutheran Church of Sun City**  
**The Eleventh Sunday After Pentecost**  
**August 3 – August 4, 2024**  
**Rev. Scott Klimke**

Exodus 16: 2-4, 9-15

Ephesians 4:1-16

John 6:24-35

The Bible is about many things, but the importance of relationships and the building of community is among the most important. Whether it's our relationship with God, one another, or the rest of creation, the Bible always says we go as our relationships go; that we're as strong or weak, healthy or unhealthy, as the relationships and communities in which we invest ourselves. It's why a deeply polarized America where we're all too ready to run over one another and elevate our tribe's concerns over the concerns of everybody else here and abroad should be of grave concern to us. It's a recipe for disaster if God and God's word are indeed living and true. The problem is we're not particularly good at relationships and community and the faith, hope, and love that allow them to prosper. Which is to say, we're not good at pretty much all of the stuff which will always be in our best interest.

Look no further than our reading from Ephesians. It literally feels as if it has to beg us to do the right thing. We're begged to be patient. We're begged to be humble. We're begged to be gentle. We're begged to bear with each other in love. We're begged to building each other up into Christ in every way, who did leave the glories of heaven and die on the cross for the sake of relationship and community with us and the rest of the human and nonhuman world he and the

rest of the Holy Trinity love so deeply. With this so fundamental, why in the world do we have to be begged to do it? Why are we human beings so resistant to what's always in our best interests and that's faith, hope, love, relationships, community?

Traditionally the Christian answer has been that we can't help it; that original sin has been passed on to us and is more powerful than our ability to overcome it. Though sympathetic to its overall point, I myself must confess that I haven't always liked the ways in which original sin has been described down through the years. For one, I think loving and intentional parents do a beautiful thing, not a sinful thing when they procreate. But perhaps a book I've been reading perhaps puts a more palatable spin on what's involved with original sin.

Supported by all kinds of research, the basic premise is we're critters who rely on our gut as much as the rabbit who runs away or the puppy who hides when they sense danger. Research shows that human babies are born with all kinds of powerfully implanted intuitions and instincts and the environment of our raising only adds to them. And we trust these instincts and intuitions, our taboos and suspicions, deeply. If we can find just one reason, no matter how flimsy it might be, to trust our gut, and just a few other people online or in person ready to engage in the same flimsy rationalization, copious research demonstrates we'll trust our gut nearly every time. It's something the Bible knew a long time ago we learn today.

Frankly, what we encounter today would be utterly hysterical were it not so true. In our first reading, Israel is just one chapter removed from a big old party on the shores of the Red Sea that God has just opened for Israel and closed for Egypt; resulting in freedom for Israel. What's more, is just one verse before today's reading begins the descendants of God's miracle baby Isaac have feasted on dates and enjoyed plentiful water. And yet, deep down in their gut the Israelites seem to believe their best days are behind them and that familiar bondage and slavery

is better than unfamiliar freedom. And so, when the passage of just one verse without plentiful food and water provides the flimsiest excuse to do so, what do the Israelites do? They go back to trusting the gut which questions the possibility of progress and dreads the unknown no matter how much better it might turn out to be. Moses, Aaron, and God are out. Tunnel vision which finds Israel retreating to a tunnel which has no room for key relationships and communities prevails.

Turn now to our reading from John. After Jesus has just filled them to the breaking point with only five loaves and two fish and even had leftovers, the five thousand who have been fed want another sign from Jesus before they enter into a loving and trusting relationship with him. Ridiculous. Preposterous. Insane even. But predictable. When deep down in your gut you believe that you're alone, that it's dog-eat-dog and survival of the fittest, that God is dead or distantly disinterested, you're going to keep on asking for signs until you don't get one and can therefore go on trusting your gut. This is us. We're critters who for the flimsiest of reasons and without anything like overwhelming support will withdraw ourselves from that which the doctor shall always order and that's faith, hope, love, relationships, community.

It's why we all should give abundant thanks today that Jesus gives voice to what we Lutherans like to call the gospel. Hear it please, Hear it until you can't possibly forget it which is probably going to be never on this side of the hereafter. Hear that the work of God, the one thing required for an eternal, stronger than the grave, able to turn back all comer's relationship with God is faith in Jesus. And hear this too! Next week in the verses that follow today's reading Jesus is going to say there's only one way to have faith in him and that's if God the Father through God the Spirit gives such faith to us. This is the gospel that we are saved by grace alone, in Christ alone, through faith alone. This is the assurance that God has our number and isn't about to

expect too much from us, which would happen if God ever expected us to be something we're not and that's critters who are going to ignore their brains and trust their guts more often than they should. And if God isn't going to expect too much from us or abandon us when we prove to be all too human in the disappointing sense of the word, then guess what! We should be no different in our dealings with one another.

Our reading from Ephesians is right. Slow to change as we are, undynamic as we can be, prone as we are to hold onto that which is irrational and unhealthy, we will need to bear with one another in love. We will need to be gentle and patient and humble with one another as we all struggle mightily to overcome intuitions and instincts that can and have led us away from the relationships and the communities that are life's richest blessings and our best option for something more like the Kingdom of God on earth. But as we get real with one another and prepare to forgive one another every time repentance is present, let's not forget that our reading from Ephesians has to beg us, beg us, beg us to do these things even after the Holy Spirit has brought us to faith in Jesus.

Our guts and our instincts and our intuitions remain powerful and can still wreak all kinds of havoc even today. If we're going to have a prayer of building each other up into Christ in every way, we're going to need some guardrails that block off the exits which would afford access to another flimsy, minorly supported reason to follow our gut rather than Jesus. And for me, this brings to mind the old adage of forgive the sinner, but not the sin. As those who are called to build each other up into Christ in every way, there's never a reason not to forgive even one repentant sinner. But there's also never a reason to endorse, condone, bless, or sanction even the slightest of departures from Christ and his superior way; the way we call faith, hope, love, relationships, and community. And the well-researched book I've been reading would agree. It

says as long as it may take to happen, our guts are most likely to be talked or reasoned into something better if we find ourselves in a loving and understanding and supportive community that kindly and gently and humbly says no when we want to use flimsy reasons of limited support to go on trusting our gut. I don't know about you, but this sounds an awful lot like what our reading from Ephesians calls the Church to be. In, by, and through the Holy Spirit, let's go be such a church together and bear with each other in love when it doesn't happen. Amen!