

***Sermon for 5<sup>th</sup> Sun of Easter Year A, May 10 2020, & Mother's Day***

*By Rev. Ingrid Chenoweth, Good Shepherd Evangelical Lutheran Church, Front Royal*

Happy Mother's Day! Mothers and grandmothers and great-grandmothers, we honor you today for all the ways in which you have given so much of your selves in the difficult but holy work of raising children.

When we were very young children, we believed that our parents had an answer to every question and a solution to every problem. If we get hungry or lonely, we'd run to mom or dad to make everything better. But then as we grew, we began to suspect that maybe our moms and dads didn't know everything. Maybe our parents didn't seem to appreciate the music listened to, or how to help with calculus homework, or why we absolutely could not wear our cousin's hand-me-downs even though the clothes were in perfectly good shape. We began to see that our parents could make mistakes.

Later, as we began to try to make a life on our own, all of a sudden our parents get whole lot smarter. At that stage in life we realize everything they've navigated, and we gain a newfound respect for our parents and grandparents - especially when we have kids of our own. Parents so look forward to the day their kids become parents - not only for the joy of being grandparents, but also because we take pleasure in the thought of our kids dealing with the same diapers and spills and sleepless nights that we did with them!

But when our kids – or nieces and nephews - are grown and they come to us with a worry or a problem, we know that some simple, pat answer isn't really what

they need. What we offer instead is our selves. We find ourselves saying, “I can’t tell you what to do, but I love you and I’m here for you.” When children are grown, the best gift we can give them is our imperfect, vulnerable selves. We give - not answers - but a companion on the journey.

There are some big questions that our faith helps us answer. *Who is God?* John’s gospel tells us without hesitation, God is love. God is like the father of the prodigal son who waited unfailingly for his wayward boy to come home, and when he finally saw him, wrapped him in an embrace before the son even had a chance to speak. God is the One whom death could not hold, the One who calls slaves into freedom, and the dead back to life.

Another big question faith helps us answer is: *What happens to us when we die?* God calls us home! We are welcomed into the embrace of a love beyond anything we could have imagined.

Our faith answers the question, *How should we treat one another?* Jesus summed up what God requires of us: that we love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love our neighbor as ourselves.

But as much as we might wish it were the case, our faith doesn’t give easy answers to all our questions. Many of the questions we wrestle with don’t have clear-cut answers in the Bible. When it comes to questions about economics, medicine, politics, and social issues, and others, faithful Christians find themselves taking various positions that are different from those held by other faithful Christians. And sometimes the more we think and pray and study, the more questions we have. That’s normal and it’s good. Only by wrestling with Scripture, wrestling with the hard questions, can we grow.

There is a solid foundation of truth, though, on which we stand, no matter how the ground might be shifting under our feet. Jesus is that solid-rock foundation. In the midst of all the questions and uncertainty, we stand on our relationship with Jesus. The relationship that's been forged stronger than steel through the fire of the Holy Spirit and the waters of our baptism.

In today's Gospel reading, Thomas, Philip and the other disciples have questions for Jesus. He's been telling them that he's going to be leaving, but that he will be preparing a place for them. Thomas asks, "Where are you going?" Behind that question is the deeper question of "Why? Why do you have to leave us?" But Jesus doesn't really answer their questions. Maybe he can't, because he knows that the disciples would be unable to understand why. Would it even be possible for him to interpret the Father's divine will so that they could understand it? Could he put into human words the deep sacrificial love that motivates Jesus' actions? Would any of this make sense, or lessen the disciples' grief and worry? Instead of answering the "why" question, Jesus answers the question of "Who." He is the one who loves them and, in turn, who makes clear the Father's love. He is the one they have known and can trust and who will do what they ask and provide them what they need. He tells them not to worry about where they're going because it's not a map that will lead them there, it's Jesus himself. He says, "I am the way."

We so badly want answers. We want to know who's right, and whom we can blame for making mistakes. We want to know what to do to stay safe and how to keep our loved ones safe. We want to find answers to our questions about when

and how to reopen our businesses and churches safely, and what life will look like in the future.

While we wrestle with those difficult questions, Jesus walks alongside us. Reminding us that he will never leave us. Breathing into us His Spirit of life and peace and strength. He is our companion on this journey, and He is faithful. We don't have to be afraid.