Hello! My name is Cynthia (Cindy) Keyser. Welcome to the beautiful sanctuary at Christ Lutheran Church in Roanoke, VA where I have served as Pastor, alongside my colleague David Skole. for just over 10 years.

*Read Gospel*

November 22, 2020 is the last Sunday of this church year, Christ the King, Reign of Christ Sunday. The new church year begins Sunday the 29th, the first Sunday of Advent. But November 22, 2020 is also a historic day in the life of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. 50 years ago, Elizabeth Platz, became the first Lutheran woman ordained into the ministry of Word and Sacrament in the United States. I feel great privilege in the opportunity to share God’s word with you on this important day.

The words of Jesus from our reading in Matthew are ones many of us know well. “I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.” On this day when we celebrate not only the ministry of all the baptized, but specifically the ministry to Word and Sacrament, I can’t help but think of the pastors who have lived those words and been my own role models.

I am a third-generation pastor. My Grandpa Keyser was the kind of person and pastor that took Jesus’ words in our passage today quite literally. Back when people used phone books and even further back when names in phone books included titles – Mr., Dr., Rev… - my grandfather would get phone calls at all hours from strangers in need of help. And he would go - to bring food to someone who was hungry, a coat to someone who was cold, money to someone who needed shelter for the night…

My dad was a very different kind of pastor than my grandpa, but no less faithful in living the life of faith to which Jesus calls us today. My dad was the pastor who always showed up before a parishioner’s surgery no matter how early. He was the one who would visit the child of the congregation who was in prison. He was a pastor in the truest sense of the word – he *loved* his people.

For much of my growing up though, my dad’s people were refugees and older and disabled adults with no family to care for them. When I was a little girl we moved to Florida so that he could serve as the director of Suncoast Lutheran Ministries. And so, as a family, we joined Trinity Lutheran Church in downtown St. Petersburg. For eight years, Pastor Priit Rebane became another role model for me. He loved me and my family. In a congregation with very few children he spent time with me as I prepared for first communion, as I learned to serve as an acolyte and reader. He took time every Wednesday for two years with me and one other youth for Confirmation instruction and conversation.

That trip down memory lane is all to say that I had some really great pastoral role models growing up. But something was missing. It never really occurred to me as a child or even a teenager that I could be a pastor – even 15-20 years after Elizabeth Platz was ordained. Because, despite my resemblance to my family of origin, none of those pastors really looked like me or sounded like me. None of them were female.

It wasn’t until I neared the end of college (Go Seminoles!) that I began thinking that seminary might be the next step. Mind you, I was not at all sure of being a pastor, maybe a Christian counselor, but as I neared graduation I felt a call to move in that direction. My mother, thoughtful feminist that she was, knew better than I did that I should go to seminary and she understood my hesitation. So she arranged a meeting with a WOMAN what was a pastor and friend of my parents to meet with us and it made all the difference in the world. Thank you, Sue Gamelin.