

**IMPORTANT INFORMATION:** The stories, and other elements of this sermon, contain copyrighted materials. We purchase them and have permission to use them in our parish, but not outside of it. Please do not post this sermon, or the stories in it, on any social media site. That would violate our agreement and subject us to a fine

**Pentecost 23 B – October 31, 2021**

**“Why do we do what we do?”**

**Read: 2 Corinthians 5: 11 - 21 /Memorize: 2 Corinthians 5: 14**

Today we celebrate The Festival of the Reformation, confirmation, a campaign and an anniversary, all coming together. They say God works in strange and mysterious ways. Our congregation is 60 years old this month. We’ll have our big celebration for the campaign and anniversary on Nov. 21.

Why are we gathering for worship, reading lessons, singing hymns, preaching about Jesus, confirming people and praying? Why are we helping Habitat, CCIA, OCC, Lutheran World Relief, Christmas baskets and a myriad of other things? We hear the answer in 2 Corinthians 5: 14, “For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all and therefore all died.”

Many shy from talking of death. We remember that in dying to sin through Jesus, we become alive to God. We share this promise every time we gather because death has been conquered by Jesus death and resurrection. We can be certain that one day, all who believe in Jesus will be gathered around the throne of God.

We do what we do because the love of Christ compels us. We do what we do because the Church, for 2,000 years, has been proclaiming Jesus as Lord, using His Word to help us grow in faith and celebrating the sacraments as a means of strengthening ourselves for that mission. Through those connections the Holy Spirit works to call, gather, enlighten and sanctify us into His Holy Body, the Church.

We are in the fifth generation of families at Good Shepherd. This fifth generation is represented by the young people like (use names of kids) and all the other kids who come here. We are here because four generations, living faithfully and willing to make sacrifices, supported Good Shepherd by going. We were built on those generations and all the preceding ones, since Jesus’ resurrection. The church has endured despite all the forces against it. We know that it is God’s power and care that made that happen.

From our theological perspective, we believe that congregations are divinely created by God. God calls people together to carry out His mission of “Sharing Christ, Changing Lives!” That’s our short hand for making disciples.

When Bob spoke about President Wicher saying we are unique, one of the things that comes to my mind is the fact that we have seen adults, along with children, come to faith in Jesus Christ and bear witness to that faith by their baptisms. Adults being baptized doesn’t happen in a lot of Lutheran congregations. That’s a sad thing.

Perhaps, the greatest reason for that lack of disciple – making is that they have developed an inward focus. It is the natural orientation of any group to become self-centered, to only care about themselves, their comfort, needs, desires and concerns. The end result of that behavior is the congregation dies. It may take years, even decades, but unless they repent, it is the inevitable end.

Our “Go campaign” is our bold way of saying that dying is not God’s plan for His Church. There are generations of disciples to come. We do need to care for one another, but it can’t stop there. There are thousands of people around us who need God’s care, also. We’re the hands and feet of Jesus to accomplish that.

There is an awful lot of division and self-centeredness right now. That is killing us. That is not of God. I can firmly say that because God tells us He is love. Where there is no love, it is not of God. What can heal this situation? The love of Jesus Christ, shared by His people.

Jesus’ love is the only power that can break through that self-centeredness. When we believe and trust in God we affirm our faith in Him. Jesus died for our sins. His sacrifice, His love, compels us to care for others. When we love God and love our neighbor, Jesus says we’re fulfilling the whole law.

There are so many stories I could share with you about how Good Shepherd has loved people and changed their lives. Here is one I was privileged to participate in as God’s servant.

In 2001 Mark and Kathy Panek enrolled their child in Little Lambs Preschool. One day, they invited Roxann and me to dinner. After dinner I was asked: Would I be willing to

baptize their three boys? Then, the mom had one more question. Would I baptize her? By the way, Roxann shared that 64% of the children in preschool currently have no church home. So there are lots of opportunities to share Jesus and change lives still.

On the day of their baptisms Kathy's dad, Bob Furnum, spoke with me. He said he wished he had gotten to church earlier because he also would have liked to be baptized. I told him I would love to help him accomplish that. Bob went through instruction, just as Kathy did. In May of 2002 Bob was baptized and became a child of God. He was so happy; so was his wife, Delores.

Not long after that, Bob spoke with me about his mother, Eva. She was not baptized. She was in poor health and he was very concerned because he wanted her to go to heaven just as he knew he was. He asked if I would speak with her. I made my visit in early Sept. 2002. Eva lived right next door to Bob. We visited about many things, including Jesus. I asked Eva if she was ready to be baptized. She said, "No, I'm not ready."

We set up to get together again in two weeks. On that day, Bob called me. He said Eva was not responsive. After the call, I prayed and then called Bob back. I asked if I could come to pray with the family. As I was driving out to Cheshire I was talking to God about this.

When I arrived, as I walked towards the house, I heard laughter. When I went in, there was Eva, sitting up in her bed, laughing with her family. We talked about Jesus. I asked her if she believed. She said, "Yes." I asked if she was ready to be baptized. She said, "Yes." I baptized her, surrounded by her family as they rejoiced.

Within hours Eva was no longer responding. Four days later she died. At her funeral we shared the joy of know she was home with her Lord, Jesus. That shouldn't surprise any of us because we know the lengths to which God went in order to save us.

Our "Go campaign," can help each of us become more fully devoted followers of Jesus, enabling us to touch lives by "Sharing Christ, Changing Lives!" Our story may be different, but the love of Jesus never is. Jesus' love enables us to do and give immeasurably more than we could ever imagine. We have God's Holy Spirit and Jesus Himself. That's why we GO!