



Church At Home
St. Timothy's Lutheran Church – Pembroke, Ontario
Pentecost 9 **August 10, 2025**

Prayer of the Day

Almighty God, you sent your Holy Spirit to be the life and light of your church. Open our hearts to the riches of your grace, that we may be ready to receive you wherever you appear, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

The Holy Gospel: Luke 7:18-30

The Holy Gospel according to Luke.

Glory to you O Lord.

The disciples of John reported all these things to him. So John summoned two of his disciples and sent them to the Lord to ask, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" When the men had come to him, they said, "John the Baptist has sent us to you to ask, 'Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?'" Jesus had just then cured many people of diseases, plagues, and evil spirits, and had given sight to many who were blind. And he answered them, "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me." When John's messengers had gone, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who put on fine clothing and live in luxury are in royal palaces. What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written, 'See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.' I tell you, among those born of women no one is greater than John; yet the least in the kingdom of God is greater than he." (And all the people who heard this, including the tax collectors, acknowledged the justice of God, because they had been baptized with John's baptism. But by refusing to be baptized by him, the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected God's purpose for themselves.)

The Gospel of the Lord

Praise to you O Christ.

Homily by Rev. Dr. Kara Carter - Liminal Transformational Pastor, Elmira Mennonite Church

Who doesn't love receiving a gift – a colourful summer bouquet, a gift card to your favourite restaurant?

Gifts are great!!

Until they're not!

What DO you do with the sweater that is 2 sizes too big... or the book you have already read??

Bless our sweet grandkids.... they're twins This is a gift they gave me several years ago when they were maybe 6 or 7. It's a bobble-head Jesus! What in the world do I do with a gift like this?

It became routine. Every time Carter & Kendall came over, they headed straight to the drawer of the living room coffee table. Out of the box came Jesus with giggles! Before heading home, bobble-head Jesus was tucked safely away in this box, back in coffee table drawer.

Boxes are a good thing. They hold things for us like gifts; we use boxes to ship things. To store things. Boxes are good. Until they aren't!!!

It was October 2008. Al and I were in a VERY long line at the funeral home. Long-time acquaintances just ahead of us. Following some light back and forth catch up..... I mentioned that we had just come from my University of Waterloo graduation. A long uncomfortable silence followed.... Finally, one partner of this couple said: You graduated??? Really? you...It was nasty – just ask my hubby. After a long pause when I finally found my words, I calmly responded “Yes... I graduated today! I didn't dare tell them I just started seminary with my dear friend Bruce.

So, what was it this acquaintance did??? They put me in a box! They remembered the younger me, the me who could be pushed around, belittled, the less-confident me.

According to the sage wisdom of Russel Levenson: *Boxes are great for storing old things, or to receive new things.... But life can't happen if we stay in the same old box.* No one's story proves this more powerfully than Jesus. Companions and acquaintances along the way tried to put Jesus in a box.

When messengers of John the Baptist came to see if Jesus is whom he says he is, Jesus' responds with a litany of miracles – indicating the kind of salvation the Messiah brings.

“Go and tell John,” Jesus says, “what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the poor have good news brought to them.” After sending the messengers on their way, Jesus addressed the crowd to further distinguish himself.

Jesus tells the crowd that for as hard core as John the Baptist is, John is nothing compared to the least in the kingdom of heaven. Verse 28: “I tell you that no greater human being has ever been born than John. Yet whoever is least in God's kingdom is greater than he.”

What is it Jesus is saying?

To see Jesus for who he the Christ really is, means letting go of associating faithfulness to God with religious dignity and respectability!

Wait just a minute! Isn't religious dignity and respectability one of the boxes we like to put Jesus in – and what about our siblings in Christ? Him? Really? This locust eating one is among the best of the best in terms of whom God calls??!!

Yes, that's what Jesus is saying. But we thought we understood what greatness looks like and who fits in the box entitled power.

Did you catch which crowd members gets what Jesus said. It's the tax collectors and the least of the least in the crowd. And the Pharisees and legal experts in the crowd.... they reject God's will for themselves saying, "We haven't been baptized by John."

The least of the least are freed from boxes that keep them small and without voice – and the religious leaders are captive to their "us versus them box," blind to God's **divine power** manifest in their midst. So, we ponder, what is it for us to recognize Jesus as the Christ - separating who Jesus is from power as typically understood.

Our context isn't so different from first century understanding of power – power is acquired through wealth, or status, position - globally, we are witnessing extreme abuses of power – power in the hands of the richest of the rich on backs of the middle class, the last, the lost, the least.

Do you remember the backlash from some powerful following Bishop Mariann Edgar Budde's who boldly spoke truth to that kind of power the day following inauguration. Some didn't like the good news message of mercy, compassion, empathy for the least of the least!

Throughout his ministry, Jesus was unafraid to challenge the boxes of false beliefs, corrupt systems, abuses of power, and hypocritical leaders.

In Matthew 23, Jesus strongly rebuked the most influential religious leaders of the time – the Pharisees and the scribes. "You hypocrites!" he railed. You people are blind! How terrible it will be for you - you give to God a tenth of mint, but you forget about the more important matters of the law – justice, peace, faith.

Jesus doesn't hold back. Throughout his earthly ministry, Jesus was distinguishing himself as the Messiah.

Who is this Jesus??

Some considered Jesus to be a real rebel rouser stirring up controversy and tension... but he walked in the shoes of peace. Others tried to put Jesus in the Rabbi box. – but then you could find him worshipping in all kinds of places, not just the synagogue. And he was teaching strange things like, "the first shall be last and the last shall be first."

Some tried to put Jesus in the Holy and Righteous box .. but Jesus kept hanging out with all the wrong people... including tax collectors & sex workers. Jesus didn't seem too interested in making distinctions between those deemed clean or unclean. Still others tried to put Jesus in the strong male leader box, but he specifically recruited women in a male-dominated patriarchal culture.

On Palm Sunday Jesus was hailed king... yet he lived a servant life. He washed Peter's feet and he told his disciples. I have set an example for you to follow.

What about the "Jesus who does me a favour box?" It's a belief that God is obligated to respond to our requests if we pray the right way, worship the right way, believe the right way.

What is the problem with this?

The problem is our God doesn't minister in that box. Jesus doesn't minister in that box. Indeed, no box could hold Jesus. When all boxes failed, what did Jesus' enemies do? They crucified him and buried him in a box, called the garden tomb. Surely, as the Roman crucifiers dusted off their hands, they thought... "well, that's done."

Through the power of God's love, Jesus showed them – and us - you can't keep me in a box – not any box. When Jesus was raised from the dead, still he didn't do what anyone expected of him. He didn't ride back into Jerusalem – sword-wielding, justice seeking, with revenge burning in his heart.... Instead, he showed himself first to women. And he showed up in quiet places, like a garden at dawn, a locked room amongst fearful disciples, on the beach barbequing fish.

Following his resurrection, he comes alongside two disciples heading to Emmaus. We might expect Jesus to say "Hey friends. It's me. But he doesn't. Rather Jesus asks the two travelers what they are talking about.

This leads to the telling of events as they unfolded over the previous days – and full-on Bible study.

The Risen Christ takes these two all the way through the Hebrew Scriptures... and in the process, their boxes begin to break down.

They thought they had it all figured out. Death is a reasonable expectation after a tortuous crucifixion. Jesus in the box. But he's not. When it looks like Jesus plans to continue down the road, the two invite him to come and eat with them.

Jesus the guest becomes the host. He takes the bread, blesses it – breaks it.. and.. they get it... they recognize Jesus – the real Jesus – the resurrected Jesus. And surely, just as questions were about to spill over, Jesus disappears. But he leaves something behind. Do you know what it is? His presence...which dwells within and amongst us!

Friends, in what ways do we put Jesus in a box?

If we are not regularly alarmed by the way Jesus calls out religious leaders and welcomes blue haired tattooed street kids, we have put Jesus in a safe box.

If we aren't surprised or confused by Jesus' teachings or his interactions with those on the margins, we have probably domesticated Jesus into a version that we can handle – either that or we aren't reading Scripture!

If we have not felt the cringe of loving enemies we have stuffed Jesus in a pretty box with a bow on top.

If we are so familiar with Jesus and have adapted a narrow version of his identity as the Messiah, we have stuffed Jesus into the tame box...

But Jesus cannot be tamed. Because Jesus will surprise us - will affirm and offend us. He will not be contained by the boxes we try to put him.

Jesus invites us to follow him – to live with bold faith – beyond our comfort zone and Sunday School faith – it is the invitation to keep company with sketchy folks and share table fellowship with those we don't see eye to eye.

Jesus asks us to forgive someone who has caused pain, to stop gossiping, to give away our money, maybe even go back to school as a mature student. And none of this will feel comfortable. It will be hard work. It is hard work because our spiritual transformation always involves growing pains, and stretch marks, a new birth, AND liberation from the boxes of our construction. – the self-sufficiency box; the false sense of security box, power and control box.

Oh, we can survive in these boxes... but we will never thrive as Easter witnesses of resurrection. Because Jesus has left his presence with us. WE are forever being transformed as Easter people who proclaim and embody new life is possible, new beginnings, opportunities, change, hope!

We are graced with capacity to hold doubt and faith in tension – release our need to be right – proclaim each person has been created in the image of God – and experience freedom from all the ways we make faith too narrow.

May God's box busting ways unsettle us, challenge our complacency, and bring us to new life... for this is the God who raised Jesus from the dead through the power of love – has created us to be! Amen.

Gathered into one by the Holy Spirit let us pray as Jesus taught us.....

Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Benediction

The Lord bless you and keep you,
The Lord's face shine upon you and be gracious unto you,
The Lord look upon you with favour and give you (+) peace. Amen.

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STTLC Communiqué

In Our Prayers Today.....

Danny Schultz, Lila Martinat, Irlavere Tubbe, Bobby Keuhl, Adele Krieger, Tracy Schori, and Christa Reitlingshoefer.

Welcome Rev. Dr. Kara Carter who is joining us this morning and bringing the message. Pastor Kara is currently serving Elmira Mennonite Church as their Liminal Transformational Pastor. We are pleased that Pastor Kara and Alvin are able to join us.

Crisis in the Holy Land...the ELCIC National Office and Eastern Synod are launching an appeal to support the ministries of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL). Our goal is to raise \$50,000 to assist in supporting this vital work that embodies faith, resilience and hope of a just peace. More information can be found on the "Our World" bulletin board or at <https://elcic.ca/holy-land/>. Donations can be made through your offering envelope or virtual number by noting ELCJHL Appeal on it. Thank you for supporting our friends.

Thought of the Day.....

"The past is a source of knowledge, and the future is a source of hope. Love of the past implies faith in the future."

Stephen Ambrose

