

Sermon – John 14:15-21; Acts 17:22-31
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Grace Lutheran Church
6 Easter – Year A
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“From Ignorance to Truth”

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Sisters and brothers in Christ, grace be unto you and peace in the name God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. Why did the computer go to the doctor? Because it had a virus! This is what happened when I logged into ChatGPT, the artificial intelligence chatbot from OpenAI, and gave it the following prompt: write a Lutheran sermon on artificial intelligence and Paul’s visit to the Areopagus and include a joke. Within seconds, it produced a perfectly mediocre sermon, which you won’t be hearing this morning. Fortunately, my job is not in jeopardy quite yet. Mostly I was relieved to discover that AI is not yet as funny as regular I. I can continue to tell bad jokes all on my own, without any help from technology. Make no mistake, artificial intelligence is a tool with many good uses, from improved cancer screening to helping in the fight against climate change. But it’s only a tool, not a replacement for the real thing. Never mind the worst possible scenarios, in which robots take over the planet, as in the *Terminator* movies. The more likely scenario is that predicted by Andy Crouch in his recent book *The Life We’re Looking For: Reclaiming Relationship in a Technological World*. Crouch warns of a world in which life is less full and more boring. When we give away more of what it means to be human, we become less human. Our beings were made to live and move. The tools we

develop are best used to help us become more, not less, human. But the more of our humanity we give to the artificial, the less intelligent we become.

2. Of course, the search for artificial intelligence, for an intelligence *out there*, is nothing new. It is as old as humanity. Whereas our quest is dominated by the drive for greater technology, in earlier days it was couched in religion and the quest to minimize or evade the vicissitudes of this life. Today we worship at the altars of the false gods of productivity and efficiency. We don't think of them as gods, but we treat them as such, willingly enslaving ourselves and exploiting one another. Perhaps we are not so different from the peoples of the ancient world who worshiped at the altars of artificial gods named Zeus, Athena, and Apollo, gods finely crafted of gold, silver, or stone, who in the end could do nothing for the people who devoted so much time to their creation and worship. In creating images of artificial gods, people became less human. The image of God was never meant to be found in gold or silver, and that is true whether we fashion gods from these elements or worship the treasure in our bank accounts and stock portfolios. The image of God, the *imago Dei*, is not found in the artificial. It is in you, for it is in you that God lives and moves; it is in the true, Triune God that you have your being.
3. So it is that Paul stands before the cultured elite of Athens and declares them religiously ignorant. They have created the finest gods money can buy, but they are no closer to the truth, either of who God is or who they are. They have given away their real humanity to artificial divinities that can do nothing for them in return. How often we do the same! The one thing Paul affirms amidst all their religiosity is what they don't know. Walking through Athens, he had noticed an altar erected to an unknown god. This thing they don't know provides the opening for Paul to preach what he does know, that the true God is not made of precious metals or finely-wrought stone. The true God is the One who bears the image of God as flesh and blood, the One who comes not to make life pleasantly boring, but who enters into all of the

deeply painful parts of humanity to save and redeem us. God in Jesus becomes human so that we, too, can become more, not less, human. God in Jesus becomes human to raise us into the life that is really life.

4. On our own, our creative quests will continue to go awry as we misuse our insights and inventions for selfish gain and ill purposes. But we are not on our own. On the night of his betrayal, as he prepares his disciples for a world in which he will no longer be present in the same way, Jesus promises that he will not leave his disciples orphaned or alone. He will send another Advocate, one to continue his work. This promised One is the Holy Spirit, the Comforter who carries on the work of Jesus in the world. Gifted with the Spirit in baptism, the *imago Dei* is restored in us. And we are restored to fulfill and enact the commands of God, who demands only that we love one another as Christ has loved us. As Christ calls us to love and as the Spirit moves in us, we discover the joy of what it means to be human, even in the midst of life's hurts and challenges. We bend our discoveries and technologies to the benefit of our neighbors and the enhancement, not the diminishment or destruction, of what it means to be human.

5. Jesus promises today that we will not be left orphaned, language that resonates for us on Mother's Day, perhaps in multiple ways. For some here today, the day is a reminder of how we have been left orphaned, actually or emotionally. Or how we yearn for children who are no longer here, or for children that have never come. For others, it is a reminder of good things, of love and nurture and care. That has been the case in my life. I see the love of God at work every day through the love Erika pours into our children. And I am grateful for the myriad ways in which my mother was, and is, a comforter and advocate for me. I vividly recall the events of January 27, 1986. It was the day after the Bears won the Super Bowl (you know, that one time) and we were playing football at recess. My friend, Matt, tackled me and, as we fell, my femur was forced out of its socket in the hip bone. It's turns out that a

dislocated hip is a gruesomely painful injury. My parents arrived at the school to take me to the hospital in our minivan. As I lay in the back of the van, my mom sat there with me, holding my hand, seeking to calm and comfort me. At one point she told me that I could just let it out, which was when she discovered that young David had learned some new words on the playground. But in the most painful moment of my life, she was there, and that made it bearable. To be human is, at times, to be in pain. But to be in Christ means we never have to be alone in our pain. The risen Christ pours out the Holy Spirit and calls us to live with love. Love, after all, is one thing that cannot be invented or replicated. Love is lived, as we live together as siblings in Christ, orphans no more.

6. The life we are given through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is exactly that: life. In all its fullness. It is not a life full or ease of absent of suffering, but a life in which we suffer with and for those who are suffering, just as Christ suffered for us. With the Spirit in us, we are ignorant no longer, and we can stop pretending, chasing after all that is artificial or superficial, resting instead in the peace and love of the God who lives in us. We have created wonders upon wonders with our God-given ingenuity; may we remember that these are tools to use for good, not idols at which to worship. May we remember where we can dependably see God's image in this world, not in silver and gold or devices and technologies, but in the cross of Jesus Christ and in the face of our neighbor. May we live and move and have our being always and only in God, whose very Spirit is alive in you now, and through whom you will live with Christ forever. Amen.

And now may that peace that passes all understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, this day and forever. Amen.

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