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Dangerously Free

Help, save, comfort, and defend us, gracious Lord. The final petition of the kyrie.

We were sitting in a circle in the nave. The church's woodwork was clearly giving off Pacific Northwest and outdoorsy vibes. It was Lake Chelan Lutheran Church. Just down from Holden Village at the edge of the Cascade mountains. I was with a group of people spending time immersing ourselves in the liturgy of the church, learning how we might use the familiar prayers, patterns of our worship to teach seekers the faith. Using them as tools of catechesis in a world where people increasingly have no inherited faith.

Did you see the video going around of a recent Jeopardy episode? The clue was "Matthew 6:9 says, 'Our Father, which art in heaven,' *This* 'be thy name.'" None of the contestants even made a guess. As one person noted, "cultural Christianity is dead."

When we got to the final petition of the Kyrie we were invited to think about all of the time and energy we spend trying to defend ourselves. We do this in myriad ways each day. All the while we curve further inward on ourselves, our open hands become clenched fists and subtle walls get built between ourselves, those around us, and the future that God is calling us to.

Looking out at the crowds Jesus is moved with compassion. As the reign of God in flesh he is moving through cities and villages proclaiming the good news of the kingdom. Bringing God's compassion to life through his own body. This would all be well and good if it stopped there. We know Jesus does this sort of thing. Jesus continues, though, summons his followers, gives them authority, and sends them out. They become apostles. They are sent ones going out to bear witness to all that God is doing in their bodies.

Did you catch what this mission involves: "Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the

lepers, cast out demons.” What shouldn’t you take with you? No gold, silver, or copper, no bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals, or a staff. Just find a place to stay when you arrive, do not plan in advance, and if a village doesn’t welcome you? Shake the dust off and try the next one. Some will be handed over to councils and flogged. Others dragged before kings and governors. Don’t worry, and don’t prepare your *defense* in advance. If you are persecuted just move on. You might be killed.

Who can live this way? Are we included in this mission? What makes people this *dangerously free*?

“Therefore since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Theologians have noted, maybe we need a phrase other than “justification by faith” to really get to the heart of the radical Lutheran insight of the reformation. Too often when we hear musing of faith we inherently start thinking of making a list of works that we must perform. Our own belief, the strength or weakness of it, the doctrines that we ascent to intellectually or otherwise, how good we are at trusting God. All of these things curve us further inward.

Faith itself is given to us in the waters of baptism. In those waters we died the only death that needs to be feared in the end. We have already been raised with Christ, forgiven and made a member of the body of Christ. So maybe a better phrase could be “justification by death.” A condition you have already met. In a world of earning and deserving, where moral one-up-manship is the favorite pastime for sinners like us, this is the offense of the gospel. We might join Robert Capon in pleading “Give me something to do, anything, just spare me the indignity of this indiscriminate acceptance.” But indiscriminate acceptance is what we sinners get from the God who is known only in the face of Christ.

You have died with Christ. What else is there to prove? Why would you ever need to defend yourself? Stop trying to save yourself. Stop holding so tightly to your life, your opinions, your things, and a future shaped by your own hands. You need not worship at the altar of self-preservation. You are free. Free to fail and fail again. Free to die to yourself and revel in it, your ego, and to all of sin’s empty promises a thousand times a

day and rise again. For we know that death only leads to resurrection. A future better than what we could ever dream up.

You and me. Simultaneously sinner and saint. Baptized children of God. The ones who need not even fear death. We are the ones who would dare live so dangerously free. We are the ones who have all we need to go. To follow those first apostles and live as Christ.

Imagine a community of people completely free from the need to justify ourselves.

This year the amount of anti-trans legislation has grown exponentially in the US. The rhetoric alone does real harm to our siblings. During Pride month, what does it look like for us to go and live as Christ among our LGBTQ family?

I'm going to talk about self-harm. The Trevor Project's 2022 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health found that 45% of LGBTQ youth seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year, including more than half of transgender and nonbinary youth. What do dangerously free disciples do about this? Educate ourselves, advocate. Speak Christ's word of love and welcome whenever given the opportunity. What else?

On the eve of Juneteenth, for us white folks, what does it mean to give up our need to defend ourselves and go. Go and work for racial justice. Go and use our hands, feet, and voices to build a world where everyone is *free* and celebrated.

Set on this fractured landscape, where else will we go and what else will we do, now that the love of God has been poured into our hearts and we live as Christ on both sides of the grave?

Christ is our help, our salvation, our defense, our life, our gracious Lord. Hear the good news: loosen your grip and go!

In the name of Jesus. Amen.