

Sermon – John 17:6-19; Acts 1:15-17, 21-26
David R. Lyle
Grace Lutheran Church
7 Easter – Year B
12 May 2024

“Not Out of This World”

Alleluia! Christ is risen! **Christ 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. Wanna get away? That’s the very reasonable question asked in the long-running campaign advertising the discounted airfare offered by Southwest Airlines. The obvious answer to the question is always yes, and as quickly as possible! Someone always finds themselves in an incredibly awkward moment – the businessman who accidentally mistakes a getaway car for an Uber, the military general who, in a moment of national crisis, is forced to reveal that his computer password is “ihatemyjob1” – and naturally they want to be anywhere other than where they are in that moment. It’s a feeling we’ve all felt, I’m guessing, knowing that we’ve just done the absolute wrong thing, and that it can’t be undone. More broadly, who does not yearn with fair frequency, either in idle daydreams or deep longing, to be out of one’s current time and place? Wanna get away? Goodness, yes.
2. Southwest may make it possible to move about the country, but even they can’t promise a permanent escape from the challenges we face in life, whether these are the doldrums and drudgeries of daily life or the deep difficulties that arise unbidden. Geographical change can only get us so far, after all, and while a change of scenery can do wonders for the soul, it can’t erase the complexity of life. We can go somewhere else in the world, but we

can't undo the brokenness of the world. And that brokenness is not theoretical; deep fissures are present in our relationships, whether in our families, workplaces, even our churches, or in the polarized divides that are even more evident than normal as we get deeper into the election cycle. Wanna get away?

3. On the eve of his death, as Jesus prepares for the crucifixion he knows is coming, he speaks to his friends. Having fed them with a new meal, washed their feet, and given them the commandment of love and the promise of the Holy Spirit, Jesus now turns to his Father in prayer. While we might expect Jesus to whisk us off someplace new, Jesus instead prays for us precisely because he is doing no such thing. Jesus does not pray that we would be taken out of this world; instead, his coming death and resurrection propels us back into this world. And Jesus prays us into unity; he declares that we are one.
4. Nothing could feel further from the truth at times. Unity can be so fragile and elusive, even in places where it seems secure. Such has long been the case, for example, in Berkely, California, described in a recent *New York Times* story this week as "largely uniform" in its liberal thought, as people moved in "lock step on matters of political and social significance." But that unity was shattered by the brutal attacks of Hamas on October 7 and the subsequent attacks of Israel upon Gaza and its people. People once unified are now deeply and bitterly divided, an echo of the longstanding and often violent divides between Israel and Palestine. Suddenly, neighbors who took their unity for granted found themselves in bitter conflict about the conflict in the Middle East. Where do we find unity in the face of such enmity?
5. The answer comes in Jesus' prayer. We don't find unity or achieve it; we receive it. We are not one because we can put ourselves back together. We are one between Jesus says we are. Baptized into his death, we receive new

life as part of the one Body of Christ. As branches grafted onto the vine that is Christ, we are connected together irrevocably, even if we're not all that sure we want to be connected. It is here, and here alone, that we find hope for the world in which we still find ourselves. Hope to find forgiveness and healing for all that divides us, hope to work for a peace, true and lasting, deserved by all people.

6. This gifting of unity is the ongoing work of the Spirit, the same Spirit promised that night by Christ. As the church, we are the people who over and over again admit that we don't quite know what we're doing or where we're going, trusting instead for the Holy Spirit to move among us and lead us forward. This has been true since the days of Acts when, following Jesus' ascension and even before the Spirit is poured out, Jesus' followers convened the first congregational meeting to elect church officers. They leave the choice to God, casting lots and trusting the outcome. Matthias becomes the new twelfth apostle, leaving Justus to serve, perhaps, on the Property Committee. We don't actually know because this isn't actually about them. They are not mentioned again in scripture. The narrative is about the God who is at work in all times and places, present everywhere through the Christ whose ascension is less about him going from *here* to *there* and more about him going from *here* to *everywhere*, present in every corner of creation, creating unity out of brokenness and empowering his church to work for peace.
7. Wanna get away? I know the feeling. But here, near the end of the Easter season, we gather in worship of the One who did not turn back from death, instead embracing it as the means of our salvation. Baptized into Christ, we are no longer of this world. But we *are* in it, precisely where God needs us to be, working as one for the many, free to be about the business of God's rule and reign in this world as witnesses of the world to come, with Jesus praying for us as we go. 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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