

Sermon – Matthew 9:35—10:23; Exodus 19:2-8a; Romans 5:1-8
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Grace Lutheran Church
3 Pentecost – Year A
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“Saved and Sent”

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

1. I spend a lot of time in the car, visiting folks and driving my kids all over creation. I could use this time to listen to podcasts or audio books, but my preference is local radio. So it is that I hear a lot of commercials. My current favorite is for a bank. We hear from a grandma and her grandson. She is preparing to go to the bank because she’s heard banks are now using “fakey smartness” and she wants to prove that she’s real. Her grandson assures her that not only is that not what artificial intelligence is for, but that this particular bank can be depended upon to provide excellent care by actual human beings. Grandma isn’t sure that’s right; she prepares for her visit by asking her grandson to pinch her. He does so, weakly, to which she responds by giving him a hard pinch. What could be more real than the reaction elicited by a pinch? It’s a cute commercial, meant to reassure listeners that – in a world where so much seems fakey, in which so little can be depended upon – there are still people who care. And who will give you a good loan rate so you can remodel your kitchen.
2. We live in a time of such uncertainty that a recent issue of *The Christian Century* posed these questions on the cover: Does God exist? Do I? These questions are foundational, and of deeper importance than where to get a good rate on a home equity loan. The article itself is a lovely mediation on Thomas Aquinas’s five proofs for the existence of God as read through the

- author's gender identity, and I commend it to you. But it's the questions themselves that jump off the cover. Does God exist? Do I? What is real? What can be trusted? What in this world isn't fake?
3. We begin today by remembering that God is not a fact to be proven, a philosophical argument to be won. God's reality is relational. God is the One who comes to us in relationship, who comes to us in promise, who comes to us to save us. We do not come to God with proofs. God comes to us in love. When the people groaned under the weight of 400 years of suffering and slavery in Egypt, God – I AM who I AM – comes to them. Ends their time of oppression. Brings them out toward the Promised Land. On the way, they come to Mt. Sinai. God blesses them with the covenant, chooses them as God's own. They are now and forevermore God's treasured possession, a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. But they are not saved for themselves; they are brought forth to be a light to the nations.
 4. In the fullness of time, God makes good on the promise of that covenant by creating the new covenant, expanding to the Gentiles, sealed in the blood of Jesus Christ. In his dying and rising, we are chosen by God as God's own. In faith we cling to the grace of God, grace freely given. We do not boast. We have done nothing to deserve it. God simply chooses to come to us in our weakness, in our sin, and make us God's own. This grace comes today to Owen, child of God forever, just as it has come to each of you. Can you believe it? How could you not?
 5. Like the people of God's first covenant, we are not saved for ourselves. Instead, we are called and we are sent. Perhaps here we have a clue that this promise is worth believing, because it is so different that world's promises. God's promise of life is abundant and overflowing, on both sides of the grace, but it is not an invitation to a life of ease, as made clear by this litany of negative outcomes in Matthew 10. It is not the ground floor of an IPO

promising trillions to the few while the rest of the world groans. It is not a free pass out of this world but the promise that Christ is with us in this world that he still so desperately loves. It is not easy work. When we proclaim the gospel, when we serve others humbly, when we work for justice and peace, we will often be resisted. Rejected. But in this suffering, we gain endurance, and character, and the only hope that does not disappoint. In our faithfulness to the One who has called and chosen us, we become not proofs, but signs of God's loving presence for others.

6. The life of discipleship is the life of the gospel, the good news that in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we who were dead are alive, forgiven, free. Our daily lives, shaped even by suffering and challenge, are part of that pattern. We let go of our false dreams, our need to create for ourselves, and receive from God the truest thing of all: God's presence with us always.

7. At our most recent synod assembly, the gathering of the ELCA throughout the metro Chicago area, the preacher spoke of the many times he has heard about how the church needs to bring in more young people. And of course, the preacher agreed with that; who wouldn't want the pews of our churches to be full again like they were years ago? Full of families who place faith at the center of their lives? Still, the preacher shared that he's begun to bristle a bit when such talk begins. After all, he wondered aloud, "What's wrong with us?" His point is not that we don't want others to come and be part of the fellowship we share; his point is simply that we do not wait for others to show up before we start to act like the church. We, as we are here assembled, are enough. For Christ is here, and Christ is enough. And, by the way, that goes for all of us. If you're the sort of person who follows the religious news, you know that this has been a time in which some Christians are doubling down on patriarchy, tightening rules to make sure that women are kept quiet in churches and out of pulpits. Well, the most loving thing I can say about that is, balderdash. Any Bible-believing Christian should know full well that the

first preachers of the gospel were the women on Easter morning. Friends, you are all part of the enough-ness of God's people gathered here today, without exception. Not half of you. All of you.

8. We are sent into a broken world, and we are broken, too. What of it? We worship Christ, broken for you, and he is enough. So go, be the church. In the word of the poet Auden, "love your crooked neighbor, with your crooked heart." Does God exist? We can do better than that. God is *here*. In water and Word, bread and wine, Christ is fully present. Do you exist? We can do better than that. For the sake of Christ, crucified and risen, you aren't just real. You are fully alive. You are alive, but you are not your own. Saved by Christ, you are sent into the world. You are a sign of the living God and God is not done yet. Can we believe it? How could we not? Amen.

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