

Sermon – Matthew 10:24-39; Romans 6:1b-11

David R. Lyle

Grace Lutheran Church

4 Pentecost – Year A

21 June 2026

“Baptized for Life”

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

1. As we approach the celebration of our nation’s semiquincentennial, we are forced to admit that we have never used nor heard the word “semiquincentennial” in our lives. What does one gift for a 250th anniversary, anyway? Plutonium? As we approach this milestone, we are also forced to admit that our nation’s political discourse rarely matches the lofty levels in which it was born; it has largely descended into farce. At least our soccer team is doing well, right? If there is any meat, so to speak, in our politics, it has to do with affordability. The word has buzz because fewer and fewer people have it. More and more people are getting by with less and less, even as the opulent abundance of our society proliferates; the dream so many were promised is becoming illusory. Even right here in Oak Park and River Forest, where we value welcoming all, it is harder for those lower on the socioeconomic ladder to make a home. More and more, folks are asking, Can we afford this? Is it worth it? Is that too high a price to pay?
2. Into this world of scrimping and saving, of worry and fear, comes Jesus. He, too, has something to offer. A life of persecution and discord; of familial disunity; of cross carrying and life losing. The cost is high and Jesus seems unconcerned with affordability. He has not come to bargain. This is it; take it or leave it. If you’re not interested, if you’d rather maintain the status quo, well, that’s fine. But try as you might to hang on to your life as it is, you will

- inevitably lose it. Jesus' words are full of warning; if we continue in sin, it will not be kept secret. We are not above our Master, and we are not able to hide what we do, individually or as a nation, from the God who sees everything. Jesus comes not with peace but with a sword, calling us to put him above all others. When it costs so much to follow, can we afford to pay so high a price?
3. Where then do we turn; whither is our hope? This past week, Grace left Chicagoland behind and travelled to Rainforest Falls, the setting for this year's Vacation Bible School. There were many highlights; I enjoyed leading songs and games. My most vivid memory is of a young boy who came up to me and, apropos of nothing, pointed his finger in my face and said, "old." Nearly 100 of us, from three-year-old children to volunteers in their eighties, spent the week together exploring the nature of God. While we weren't parsing the Athanasian Creed or pondering the works of the Cappadocian Fathers, we did get to the heart of the matter. Each day was centered in a foundational claim about who God is. God is our creator. God knows everything. God is our safe place. God is love. God is forever. To each of these, we would make our affirmation: "Wow, God!" Of course, as our gospel reading makes clear, being known by the creator God is not yet good news. The God who counts our hairs and sees the sparrows is well aware of the many ways we have fallen short. God sees the rank inequality we have brought into this world that was meant to have enough for all. But as we affirmed for the children throughout this week of VBS, God's nature does not begin with knowledge. It begins, and for that matter ends, with love.
 4. In the light of God's love, the question then becomes not, can we afford to pay so high a price? Rather, we ask, can we afford not to? Because here's the thing: While following Jesus costs us our lives, it is only in following Jesus that we find the new life that really matters. The cost is fronted by Jesus, who goes to the cross on our behalf. In his dying, we meet our end. In his rising, we are raised. And we are raised not simply into more life, but into a life that

is categorically different from the one we lived before. At the beginning of each funeral held in this space, we hear Paul's words from Romans 6: "For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his." These words of promise are dripping with baptismal hope. In the face of death, we find life. Through the cross we emerge with Jesus from the empty tomb. But these are not words meant only for the end of our earthly life. They are words that shape our earthly living, because if we have been joined to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, how can we go on living in the old life of sin and death. Should we carry on as before, Paul asks? By no means! The God who created us, who knows everything, intends us for so much more. This God made us for love. We cannot afford to live any other way.

5. On this Father's Day, Jesus' words about familial relationships strike an interesting chord. I treasure my children; has Jesus come to set us against one another? No. Jesus comes to call me, and them, to himself first. Our relationships with one another can only be healed when Christ is at the center. In giving ourselves up into God's love, we find our relationships transformed, fitting us for the purposes God intends for within our households and beyond. During VBS, at the end of each morning, I would ask the kids if they'd had any "God sightings," if they'd seen or heard or felt God that day. One day, a young boy said, "I see God everywhere around here, because everyone here is made in God's image." Amen to that. When we receive one another through Jesus Christ, we see Jesus Christ in one another.
6. Today, Jesus calls us again. Calls us to take up our cross and follow him. We are mindful of our purpose statement that shapes both our worship and work: Called by Christ, we grow in grace, live with love, and go to serve. It is a call that costs us everything yet is free for everyone. The Christ who calls us is the One who died and was raised for us. You are forgiven. You are no longer bound by this world's inequality but are free to live in service to your

neighbor in need. You are dead to sin and alive in Christ. Continue in sin? By no means! We can't afford that. But the new life in Christ is free. We lose nothing worth keeping. We gain everything worth having, for we gain Jesus himself. Take up the cross and follow, and in following find the free gift of life. Amen.

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