

“What God’s Spirit is up to...”

I am so grateful to be with you this morning. Thank you to Pastor Susan for inviting me, and for this opportunity to preach this morning. I am excited to worship alongside you & to be a witness together with you...to be a witness of the holy, astounding things that that Spirit of God is up to. I’m excited to share about what God’s Holy Spirit is up to in Chicago where I have attended seminary for the past few years, in Minneapolis, Minnesota where I have been serving as pastoral intern for the past year AND I am excited to hear about what God is up to, right here in Olathe, Kansas.

I am excited! I am also a little tired. I have been on the road a bit this week, and I’ll be on the road later today. And yet, this morning I woke up before my alarm, excited to come be with you today, share a little bit about what I have seen the Holy Spirit is up to...and learn from you about what the Holy Spirit is doing in your neighborhoods, schools and in this church.

I can’t wait to tell you about the seemingly-ordinary and yet deep moments of love I have experienced lately. I cannot wait to tell you about the new relationships I saw begin to form in the past few days at Synod Assembly. I cannot wait to tell you about the deepening relationships that have been experienced by college students over late night meals after Wednesday night worship outside the chapel at Augsburg University.

I do realize I probably don’t have time to tell you about all of that in this sermon and besides I want to hear your stories too, so we’ll have to talk after worship, and I’ll have to come back again and again. I think part of the reason I am excited to tell stories **to** you and to hear stories **from** you about God’s Spirit moving **in** and **among** our communities and **neighborhoods...**

Part of the reason I am so excited about that is that I think this is the stuff that really matters. I believe that this stuff is powerful.

---At Augsburg University this year we have begun having community meals once a month after Wednesday Night Worship. A few college students, an office administrator, a pastoral intern and a campus pastor walked all over campus and offered personal invites to people across campus to 1, join us for Wednesday Night Communion at 8pm and/or 2 to join us for waffles, free of charge at 9pm. (There’s something about breakfast at night that is just way more fun.) We have gone out of our way to tell people that they are welcome to come to one or both. If they just want to join us for waffles, we’d be glad to have them. And people have gotten the message. We’ve had students join us for worship and then stay for waffles. We’ve had students who didn’t have an interest or weren’t ready to come to worship, join us just for waffles at 9pm. It has been a joy to have new students join us for worship, and it has a joy to see students sit at tables together and make new and deepening connections with one another.

---Earlier this week a recent graduate of Bethany College in Lindsborg, Kansas told me about how she found a home at Bethany, how she felt cared for and supported. How people welcomed her into their home for dinner. She said, “when I visited Bethany college as a perspective student people were very kind and hospitable to me, and four years later people are still treating me that way.” She came to Bethany searching for footing in her spiritual life, she leaves just a few years later preparing to become a leader of God’s people in the Church.

---Earlier this year in Chicago the LSTC (The Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago) Gospel Choir had it's 30th anniversary concert. This is a choir I have been a part of for 2 years. Drawing together Gospel choirs and churches from across and around Chicago to sing praises to God, and raise scholarship money to fund students of color who are being equipped for ministry in Christ's church, in our church. 30 years.

--in Kirksville, MO a professor of Philosophy and Religion invited a small group of students into her home once a week to wrestle over scripture, express doubts and hopes and fear, and to pray together.

In our lives we experience transitions and changes of circumstance, some that are wonderful and exciting like the birth of a new child, some that bring mixed emotions like leaving one community that has been a home, for new home with blessings that are sure to come. And some that are just plain awful and devastating like the sudden illness or death of a dearly loved one. Hard times like these are moments when we become afraid, or worried and we may begin to lose heart. And it is in these moments of hardship that you all experience and that I experience. That I invite you to grieve, to feel pain, to feel a loss. And to know that God is holding you.

I remember years ago when a dear mentor of mine died, I cried, I cried a lot. I was embarrassed to cry, and yet I continued to cry. That loss hurt. I was a student invited into Dr. Jennifer Jesse's home. My faith was so enriched by her faithful witness and wisdom. When I think back I miss those days, they were hard to leave. I can see so clearly what God was up to then and yet when I look up right now in Lindsborg, Kansas and in Minneapolis, Minnesota, in Chicago I see God is at work right now in these places.

And, I know that God is at work right here too. Now you might be thinking, oh come on. What is God up to here? What is God doing now? But I bet if you take a moment to reflect you might think of something. You may think of camp Tomah Shinga. I only know a bit about camp Tomah Shinga—I know some of you have spent time there recently...I might imagine that you deepened relationships with one another, I might imagine that you experienced God in a new or surprising way. I might imagine that you have fell in love with God's good creation. But what do I know? I am excited to hear about how the life of your community and the life of camp Tomah Shinga is being renewed. I actually mean it, tell me. After worship if you've been to the camp or helped to fund the camp tell me what that's been like for you.

Friends, these are the sorts of things that God is up to. The Spirit of God is about setting all people free. The Spirit of God is about life and healing. When the Spirit of God came to rest on Jesus what did Jesus do? He did not condemn people, he did not seek to imprison or punish people. He healed people, he loved people, he freed people. We will sing it later this morning: he brings us freedom, light and life and healing. And what God is up to in our neighborhoods and communities is powerful, far more powerful than the things that will pass away. Friends let us not cling to the things that will pass away---our wealth, how popular or well-regarded we are at the moment. Let us put our hope in God.

Today's scripture tells us that what will continue to renew us today and every day, forever, is the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God is not about you or me having it all figured out or

saying or deciding where we get to go. I'll say it again, the Spirit of God is about setting all people free. The Spirit of God is about life and healing. I invite you to pay attention to the ways that the Spirit of God is moving among us, among you! To connect us with one another, to draw us closer to one another and closer to God. May we take root in things that will last, God's deep abounding grace that frees us from all guilt and shame. And may we be ever guided by God's Spirit that shoves us, pulls us, drags us to do as Jesus did—to love and care for the neighbor, the stranger, the foreigner, the refugee. Just as God has so loved us.

Friends. I'll stop calling you friends for a moment because you're really family. Family, in Christ, sisters, siblings, brothers in Christ... Dear family of God: "we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and will bring us together into God's presence. Yes everything is for the sake of you all, so that grace, as it extends to more and more people, may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God." This is a hope that extends even beyond the grace. And, family of God, it is a hope for right now! So lean into that Spirit of God, trust that Spirit of God, to hold you, to transform you, to guide you and to finally bring you home. This is the one in whom we can put our hope, our trust.

I am so excited to share about what God's Spirit is up to and I am so excited to hear from you, about what God's Spirit is up to in your life, in your communities in your neighborhoods. Amen.

Seminarian Mathew Berger, at Advent Lutheran Church, June 10, 2018