

Sunday, April 4, 2021 – Easter Sunday
“Jesus, Our Brother”

John 20: 1-18

Rev. Derek S. Klemm, Mountain View Lutheran Church, Las Vegas, NV
Frame and Refrain

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

Alleluia! Christ is Risen!

Almost a decade ago, a little boy was born. The day passed rather uneventfully for me – I do know from looking back at my planner pages that I preached that morning. The day would only take on added significance for me later that week when I received a jubilant phone call from my sister. She and her husband had been praying for a long time for God to bless them with a child. Their adoption agency had called and out of the blue, told them not only did they have a match but instead of waiting a couple of months for a child to be born, a newborn boy was already here, and he was theirs. Since the agency was only a few miles from where I lived and a few hours from my sister and brother-in-law, my nephew Jacob spent his first night with his parents at his Uncle Derek’s apartment, his Pack’n’Play set up in my kitchen, which we referred to as, “Jacob’s Room.”

Unlike many of you, I’m not yet a parent, though I think what I’m talking about relates – there’s something amazing how this person who didn’t even exist for me suddenly became one of the most important people in my life. If you haven’t had the experience of adoption, it can be an even quicker turnaround. In one life-changing moment, he became part of my family.

As blessed as we are to have Jacob in our lives, I dare say that while we’re not perfect, he’s blessed to have been placed with loving parents and a healthy sense of family and community. There has been a dramatic shift in our culture over the past few decades. As the number of methods of communicating with others have increased, as we’ve become an increasingly mobile society, the average person has actually become more disconnected. A recent study shows that over the past few decades the number of close friends the average American has dropped from 3 to 2. The percentage of people living alone has grown dramatically. With so many ways to contact people, from video to social media to phone to text to, get this, face to face conversations, I can attest that I am actually worse at keeping in touch with my long distance friendships than I was just a few years ago. So too, I expect that time with

family – and I mean true down time, with no plans, no organized events, no games or practices or performances in the schedule – has become almost non-existent for many, even as for so many, meaningful connections to one’s spouse evaporate as well. Meanwhile families tend to move more – multigenerational families who live near each other and get together often, with deep roots in the community are more and more a thing of the past. For many of us, thirsting for real connections, for safe people, for genuine love, when we find it we want to hold on for dear life – for to lose just one important person in an even more disconnected world is to feel ever more alone.

The loss of a deep connection is what the people in our Gospel text grieved this morning. Whether it’s Peter or John or Mary, they thought they had found what they were looking for – in Jesus, each of them had a sense of belonging, of community. Jesus had shown them what real love is. For the disciples who traveled everywhere with Jesus the past three years, for Mary who had been so faithful, Jesus was so much more than a passing acquaintance, or someone they followed on social media. In Jesus they found their calling, their purpose. In Jesus they found their truest friend, their rabbi and their greatest hope for both their own lives and their people at large. I dare say for each of these people, no loss of any one person could have been worse. At His call to each of them to follow Him, in one life-changing moment they and Jesus were like family.

And perhaps that’s what hurt worst for the disciples. More than simply mourning His death, they had not lived up to their status as being like Jesus’ family. John was among the disciples who fled and abandoned Jesus. Peter not only fled but then denied knowing Him. In one fear-filled moment, they turned their backs on Jesus.

There is no doubt, the most important thing about Easter is that Christ is Risen. This miracle – that He gave up His life and took it back up again, cannot be beat. Yet on a personal and emotional level there’s another piece in this text which, when you’re thinking about human connections and family might just hit us at an even deeper place than Jesus’ victory over sin, death and the devil. Hear these words from our resurrected Lord to Mary: “Go to my brothers and tell them, “I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.” Listen again – “Go and tell my brothers.”

His brothers? When we bestow a term like brother or sister on a person who is not a blood relative, we do so for their trustworthiness, their loyalty – and yet Jesus calls brothers the very men who

failed to stand up for him, denied Him and let Him down. On the face of it, this little phrase is ill-fitted to you and me too, because each of us are guilty of not staying as faithful to Jesus as we could be. Just as our world distracts us from healthy relationships with confidants, spouses and children, as we are tempted to add more superficial acquaintances and hold our true selves back from being truly known, as even our relationship with God sometimes gets pushed off to the side, there for us to use if and when we see fit and to be taken off display when it would prove inconvenient or embarrassing – for all of those moments Jesus has a word for you and for me. Hypocrite?! Two faced? Enemy? Judas? No! He calls **us** His brothers and sisters. And He wants us to know that He is returning to, in His words, “My Father **and your Father.**” In one life-changing moment – a changing from death to life, that is, Jesus made us part of His family.

We wouldn't expect this. We, who Jesus calls His brothers and sisters, are coming with baggage. Many parents when looking to adopt want a newborn. There are a number of reasons for this – it gives them the maximum influence in the child's development. It allows them to see all aspects of the child's life. There is a great need for such adoptive families, but so too there is a great need for people willing to adopt older children. Older children will remember and were deeply affected by their birth parents or foster parents (whether for good or for bad). They're people who have suffered some setbacks and who perhaps have some baggage because of it. My friends, that is you and me before our Heavenly Father – less before the world but supremely valuable in the sight of God – for He has adopted us and makes us His children, brothers and sisters of Jesus. In one life changing moment, you and I are brought into God's family through Christ's death and resurrection.

Martin Luther had this to say: “Do you have sins and a bad conscience? Your brother Jesus Christ has no sin, rather pure innocence and righteousness. Are you held fast by death? He is not held by death, but rather lives; indeed, He is life itself. This is the Christ who calls you His brother.” And now, every gift and blessing that belongs to our brother Jesus, His whole inheritance now belongs to us.

After all, we are now God's children. There is a time for adoptive children where they are with their parents but have not yet been formally declared their child. Some six months after Jacob came to be with his parents, a hearing was held at the courthouse, and there a judge esteemed my sister and brother-in-law fit to become legal parents, before pronouncing Jacob and them, “Parents and child.”

When you were baptized, the full legal rights as heirs of God's promises came to you. Eternal life, heavenly riches, the Holy Spirit being with you everywhere you go – it's yours! And just as Jacob's adoptive parents are listed as his parents legally, so does God list you and me as His children in His book of life. In one life changing moment, we became part of God's family. Thanks be to our Brother, Jesus Christ. Christ is risen! Amen.