



St John Lutheran Church

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Texts: Exodus 19:2-8a; Romans 5:6-11; Matthew 9:35-10:8

Theme: Freely, you have received...freely give. (And miracles among us)

The gracious purpose of Divine miracles is to open the doors and windows of human hearts and minds to give them an opportunity to hear and see the Gospel. **In due time** and at the proper time, however, those miracles come to an end. **Then they who** have heard and believed...**who** have not rejected the gift of faith from the Holy Spirit...**must** walk by faith. **Walking by faith** must be a most precious and important commodity that your heavenly Father wants for you to have here on earth.

The biblical pattern is that miracles are done... **and** comes then the need to walk by faith. **Our Lord performed** many wonderful miracles...**yet** after a while when people started demanding them...**He refused. He refused to perform miracles on demand...but** when people came to Him in faith...**in** faith... **in** all they had seen Him do, **in** faith in all that they had heard Him say...**He** still did miracles, quietly, sometimes privately. **The woman with** the issue of blood. **The man who's** daughter was ill and died before our Lord arrived. **The woman at the well. The list goes on.**

Even with Christ Himself, He miraculously escaped **repeatedly** from the hands of those who meant Him harm...**and** then in the Garden of Gethsemane He prayed that He might escape the cross. **But He also** prayed that His Father's will be done. **And so with** trust in His Father...**He** walked by a perfect faith to the cross, to suffer for our sins.

Then there are the Apostles, who performed many miracles. **In Jerusalem for** a while they had the run of the city...**even** using the Temple as a center for evangelism. **But in time** they had to leave the city. **Because even after** seeing all the miracles Christ had done...**and** the miracles Christ did through the Apostles...**the** enemies of Christ hardened their hearts and sought by violence and intimidation to silence the Church. **Sure, God could** have done more miracles to buy off the crowds...**to** intimidate the leadership. **But this a** time of grace...**and God will not force anyone into His Church. This is a** time of faith; God will not bribe anyone into the Kingdom by way of miracles or earthly wealth. **He offers salvation** in Christ Jesus, through His Divines Means of Grace...**and** that is an offer of inestimable love and grace.

This is the 4th Sunday after Pentecost. **Today in the Church...we are** called to remember that we are in the days of Pentecost. **A time when** we recall what we have freely received from God. **A time when** we celebrate the growth of the Church. **Growth. Bringing people to Christ. Making the Kingdom** larger as the Holy Spirit wills. **Telling others what Christ has done. And all of us are to be about this work! We are all** to be involved in getting the Word out to the nations. **Yes, beginning in** our backyards but never limiting ourselves to our backyards. **We are to** remember that we have indeed freely received all of God's great gifts to us in Christ...**now** it is our turn to freely give of what we have been given.

Wherever we see the Holy Spirit reaping a harvest, whether in our backyards or in far off foreign places, we walk by faith and contribute what we can...**to** the effort. **Whether it is** inviting a friend to Church, or helping our with VBS or Sunday School, or helping getting a youth group going, or coming to Evangelism Meetings to help our congregation plan to get the Word out! **The work is never done. We are all** to be involved, young and old. **There is no** retirement plan for the Christian...**no**, none at all. **If you are** a Christian...**if** our Lord's faith is

still alive in you...**if you are able...you** are to be about His business...**spreading** His Word, telling of His Grace, celebrating His Love and joy and salvation. **Why???** **Freely you have received...now** you are to freely give of what you have been given!

This as the Spirit leads us. And being so lead, we will be blessed by God's gracious and surprising miracles. **Miracles that allow** such evangelism to happen and allow us to have a part in such blessed work. **For the passage** in Exodus is fulfilled, all believers in Christ have been made priests to carry out the work of Pentecost: **Getting the Gospel** to all nations. **When we make** this a priority, and work with the Means that the Lord gives us, His Word and His Sacraments...**the Lord will carry us on eagles' wings.**

As a congregation we have come through a tough time. **We have lost** many members who have been called home to the Lord. **We have lost** members who have had to move because of the extremely tough economic climate here in Libby. **Our numbers have** contracted significantly...**but by God's Grace**, we remain strong...**we have** grown spiritually stronger and our budget is met year after year. **Yet...our job** and great privilege remains... **we must** continue to ask each other, "**what can we do? How can we reach out in our community and beyond with our Lord's Gospel and really impact people and their lives?**" **This is our** great challenge here at St. John Libby. **I don't know** how all of this will play out in detail...**but I do know** how it will play out in general. **You are all** the called people of God. **Each of you** is a member of the Priesthood of all believers **and you have** the most important message mankind has ever heard. **More than that**, you have God's own Word and Promise...**and** using the Means that God gives us, our Lord will bless us as He see fit...**until** then we walk by faith and work for the Kingdom, praying that our Lord will help us to help others come to Him.

Our work is never done and this work is not easy, nor will it be fun. **We are to** remember that our Lord will bless our efforts as He sees fit and in His time...**and** through difficulty and hard times we are to work ceaselessly. **Genuine Christianity is** difficult...**it is** not easy and the harder you work for the Kingdom the bigger the target you become for the devil. **Remember and understand** that as you work for the Kingdom you life may become more difficult. **If you are** making a difference in the Church and for the Church, the devil will come after you. **He doesn't bother** those who are idle...**he** doesn't need to. **And as you** remember this, remember that the Lord is with you and He promises to remain with you to the very end of the age.

We are to remember who we are as our Lord's Church...**we** are also call to remember that these are the days of Trinity. **To the world**, we want to proclaim the true God Who truly meets our true needs. **The One in Whose Name** we were baptized...**Father**, Son, and Holy Spirit. **Because of the Holy Trinity...we** have, as our Epistle put it, reconciliation with God. **Remember our salvation** is never based on who we are but Who Christ is. **He is the Light and the Life.**

Today in the Church...we are to remember what it means to be grafted into the Vine, our Lord Jesus Himself. **And remaining in** Christ and bearing the fruit of faith. **Walking by faith** and trusting in God 's miraculous help...**to be a help...in Christian mission.** **We follow Christ**, and pray that God's will be done. **True and faithful** evangelism is very near and dear to the heart of Christ... **and** so it should be with us.

Yet there is one troubling thing. **Jesus said: "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans."** **Later on, however**, Jesus will instruct the Apostles **to go** to the Samaritans and the Gentiles. **Indeed, in Acts**, we see the Holy Spirit using miracles to force the Apostles to preach to the Samaritans and Gentiles. **Yet, today we hear "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans"?** **What does this mean?** **We need to** learn that there is a time for everything. **God sets the timetable**, not us. **Jesus had to** complete everything preserved in the Hebrew Bible among the Hebrew people. **Once that was fulfilled**, then it was time to go to all the world. **Paul wrote in** our Epistle: "**You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.**" **That is how** God works our salvation story. **He did, and does**, everything just at the right time according to His Purpose and Will.

There are times when we must wait for God's timing. **We must observe** what doors He is opening and what doors He is closing. **It's not for** us to try and force our way and say it is God's way! **It is not** for us to force anyone into the Kingdom. **It is not** for us to argue anyone into the Church. **It is not** for us to water down Christianity to make it more palatable in an effort to make more Christians. **It is for** us to tell whomever we can about Jesus, about the reconciliation we have in His death, about the salvation we have through His life and about His Kingdom...**His** gift of eternal life.

This blessed Gospel message is yours. "**Freely you have received, freely give.**" **Follow Christ, remembering** that heaven has been freely given to you, in Him. **So we work** for the Kingdom in this knowledge. **Knowing that we** are not forced to work for Christ...**but that** because of all that He has done for us, **for all** He still does for us, **for all** He will do for us...**we** can do no other. **We work for** our Lord because we want to and out of extreme love and gratitude, knowing that He will bless such work done in faith and according to His Word. **And there in** heaven the miracles will never end. **In the Name of the Father and of the Son + and of the Holy Spirit...Amen.**

Pentecost 4A, 2008

Rev. Eric M. Christiansen

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