Sermon Preached by Pastor Jennifer Rose

October 4, 2015

“Made for One Another”

Isaiah 43:1-7, Revelation 21:1-5, Matthew 11:25-30

Dear Friends in Christ: Grace be unto you and Peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

A few months ago, I got a new vacuum for my home. It’s a little sad, how excited I was about this new vacuum. This thing was BEAUTIFUL. It was far from the most expensive model, but it worked like a charm. It had attachments for everything. I turned it on and the tank was full after vacuuming the first room. I took that as a sign that I had found the best vacuum ever. For weeks, we had a perfectly vacuumed home. The carpet, even though I have 4 children, looked beautiful. I vacuumed parts of my house that I had never vacuumed before.

But it wasn’t long before the novelty wore off. I stopped vacuuming quite as often. I gave up using all of those little attachments. The vacuum was put away for a while. We still get it out and vacuum when we’re cleaning. But it’s not too exciting anymore.

New things are fun. But things are only new for such a short time. Everything gets old. The new car gets those annoying rattles, and it seems like right after you get out of the warranty phase or as soon as you pay it off that major repairs need to be done. The new clothes aren’t so new anymore. The new phone isn’t so exciting anymore. That new computer for some unknown reason crashes.

Everything ages. That's the way of things. Things that are new and fresh become old and stale unless we deliberately invest our time and energy repairing and updating them. Some people like to buy old houses – run down, falling apart, very sad looking. It’s their passion to restore an old home to its former glory. They invest a lot of money, time and energy to making the old new again. It takes a lot of hard work to make something old look new again.

That goes for things, as well as relationships. A marriage becomes stale and no longer has the excitement and enthusiasm that was experienced in the early days unless the couple really work hard at keeping things fresh. Ask any couple who have been together for many years and they will tell you that it requires a lot of hard work to keep their commitment to each other fresh and alive.

There is nothing on this earth that escapes the aging process. We can all testify from experience how our bodies join in this march towards old age, demanding attention, and needing repair.

At a nursing home a group of seniors were sitting around talking about all their ailments. "My arms have gotten so weak I can hardly lift this cup of coffee," said one.
"Yes, I know," said another. "My cataracts are so bad I can't even see my coffee."
"I couldn't even mark an 'X' at election time, my hands have so much arthritis," volunteered a third.
"What? Speak up! What? I can't hear you!" said a fourth.
"I can't turn my head because of the arthritis in my neck," said a fifth, to which several nodded weakly in agreement.
"My blood pressure pills make me so dizzy I can hardly walk!" exclaimed another.

"I forget where I am, and where I'm going," said an elderly gentleman.
"I guess that's the price we pay for getting old," winced an old man as he slowly shook his head. The others nodded in agreement.
"Well, count your blessings," said one woman cheerfully, "thankfully, we can all still drive."

While talking about aging, let’s not forget that everyone is caught up in this aging process. From the moment we are conceived we become the victims of the passing of time and effect that this has on our bodies.

There are various points in our lives when the fact that we are aging becomes really obvious. For instance, when we realize that a certain part of our life is gone, never to be recaptured or relived. This may be the day you completed your schooling. On the one hand, you rejoiced that school was over for you, but on the other, it marked the end of a part of your life that will never be repeated. It was exciting to get your first job, but on the other it marked the end of a carefree life. Now you are tied down at work 5 days a week from 8:30-5 with only a few weeks of vacation. What about the day your last child, your baby, left home and you wondered where all the years had gone? Time moves on and we all get older. With the passing of time, we come another day, hour, minute, closer to that moment when our earthly lives will come to an end.

We are all mortal. There will be a day when each of us dies. And to this, the Christian faith offers something that is unique and special - hope. In fact, no-one can give a person hope like faith in Jesus does.

When Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead (remember he had already started to decay) he demonstrated beyond a doubt that there is a power stronger that death itself. Jesus has authority over death. It does not have the last say. Without any mumbo jumbo and hocus pocus Jesus simply calls out, "Lazarus, come out!" and the man came out alive and well.

In the face of the sadness and grief that death brings there is hope – Jesus gives life. When it comes to our day of dying, Jesus gives us the certain hope that beyond the sleep of death there is a glorious new life waiting for us in heaven. Jesus’ own words give us this hope, *"* I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.”

What a comfort this has been to the dying and the grieving – Jesus has died on the cross for us. His death has made us clean and new. He has made it possible for us to enter eternal life.

In the book of Revelation, we get a glimpse of what heaven is like. We are told about the crowd that was too large to be counted gathered around the throne of God, praising the Lamb who sits on the throne. Next we hear about the new heaven, the new earth and the new Jerusalem made of pure gold and its foundation stone made of precious gems. What a picture!

The vision expands in today's lesson from Revelation 21. Nothing less than a totally new earth, and an utterly new heaven in which everything that is wrong in our world at this time will be made right in God’s new creation. This will be a world in which *"the home of God is among mortals" (21:3).*God is with us, next to us, wiping away every tear from every eye.

Words cannot express what is indescribable. We can only gain an impression. God is with his people and all the things that have upset us and hurt us in this life will no longer exist in heaven. There will be no more death. What a fantastic future!

Let me read to you again those amazing words!
*I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more, mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have been passed away.’*

This gives hope in the face of the worst tragedies that fill our lives. We’ve faced quite a lot of tragedy in Fergus Falls in recent weeks. This type of tragedy can leave us with a lot of questions. Where do we turn when things are so sad that our hearts are literally hurting from pain?

To these questions, Jesus offers us these words from our Gospel reading: “Come to me, all you that are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.”

Jesus has promised that he has gone to prepare a place for every believer in the heavenly home. This gives us a hope that is beyond all other hope.
To the person who is battling cancer,
to the parents grieving the loss of their child,
to families grieving the loss of a parent, grandparent, son or daughter;
to the person breathing their last breath on this earth,
Jesus gives hope.

Sure we will still suffer the human feelings of fear and grief, but these are balanced with an inner confidence that Jesus is Lord and that he is ready to take the hand of our loved one or even our hand as we walk through the valley of the shadow of death. He will lead us to the glorious place where there is "*no more death, no more grief or crying or pain"*– the place where God dwells in the midst of his people.

In the meantime, we gather together in Christian community. We are made to be in community with each other. We experience joy and sadness together, hope and laughter and tears and anger. With the gift of community, we can hold each other up when we feel that we just can’t go on. We can remind each other about God’s great love for us, about the promises we hear in scripture, and we can be a community that truly cares for one another. We may not know any of the details about our future. We don't know what life holds for us in the years ahead. Neither do we know what troubles and joys lie ahead. The details of our future in this world are all uncertain and unknown, but there is one thing that we can be certain about and that is - we have a Savior who loves us and who holds our lives in his hands and deals with us lovingly and in the most caring way possible. And in this love we place our hope.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.