In this life, there are things **we have to do** and things **we get to do**. We *have to* go to school or be taught at home for a prescribed number of years. If our parents don't make sure that happens, someone else will step in and do it. We *have to* find a job to support ourselves and our families. If we don't, hard times will follow. We *have to* drive on the right side of the road, stop for stop signs and red lights, pay attention to the speed limit. When we do not do those things on a regular basis, we'll have some explaining to do to the judge. We *have to* pay our taxes or face the relentless attention of the IRS. We *have to* keep our hands off our neighbors' property and off our neighbors themselves or face the consequences. As citizens, laws and rules for social order shape our lives and guide our behavior and the decisions we make. All of us live under the canopy of the *have to's* of life and most of the time, we don't even think about how they shape our day-to-day lives.

And then there are the *get-to's* of life. Mostly, we equate those things more with pleasure and less with duty. Because we live in a beautiful part of the world, we *get to* enjoy the beauty of God's creation. We *get to* walk and run and kayak and drive through lush and lovely countryside. Though some people have families that bring them more pain than pleasure, most of us are thankful that we *get to* be in the families that God has given us. We are fortunate that we *get to* love and be loved in this world. We *get to* experience the beauty of art and music and literature. We *get to* swim in oceans and climb mountains and dream beautiful dreams. Sometimes we even *get to* see those dreams come true.

Sometimes our *have to's* and our *get to's* overlap. We love school and make learning a priority for our whole lives. We work at a job that we love and can't imagine doing anything else. But mostly, the *have to's* and the *get to's* of life are separate in our minds and hearts and we are willing to do the *have to's* if we are rewarded with the *get to's* in life.

I'm not sure exactly how the disciples would have described their life with Jesus, as a *have to* or as a *get to*. In order to follow Jesus, the disciples *had to* give up a lot; they *had to* leave their homes and jobs and families in order to be with Jesus. Once with him, other *have to's* took the place of the first ones. The disciples *had to* go where Jesus went. They *had to* listen to him preach and watch him heal. They *had to* believe that what Jesus said was true, that he was the Son of God and that what he was telling them came straight from the heart of God. But in the disciples' case, most of their *had to's* were also their *get to's*. The disciples *got to* follow Jesus, to go where Jesus went. They *got to* listen to him preach and watch him heal; they even *got to* do some of those things themselves. The disciples *got to* believe what Jesus said was true and *getting to do* that changed their lives. Being with Jesus, listening to him and believing him was the great privilege of the disciples' lives. But the disciples were human and sin and weakness sometimes got the upper hand. When Jesus asked his disciples “Who do people say that I am?” the disciples hedged their bets. Maybe they figured that if they gave Jesus several of the interpretations they had heard from people about Jesus' identity, Jesus would pick one and that would be correct answer to Jesus' question. You can almost hear the hesitation in the disciples' voices. “Well, some say you are John the Baptist, but you're not him...are you?” “Other people say you are Elijah, come back from the dead to lead God's people...but that doesn't sound quite right, either, does it?” Someone else piped up, “I've heard some people say you are Jeremiah or one of those other prophets. You're not, are you?”

Jesus was quick to take the conversation from the disciples' head knowledge of him straight to their hearts. “Thanks for letting me know what people are saying,” Jesus said to his disciples, “but who do ***you*** say that I am?” That was a different question altogether. For it is far easier to offer up head knowledge – what other people have to say – than to put one's own heart on the line. Simon Peter was the first to speak, but we get the idea that he was speaking from his heart, rather than trying to answer a question correctly. “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” It was a declaration so spontaneous and so honest that Jesus decided then and there to build his church on the foundation of Peter's faith. It was a *get to* kind of statement that revealed the honor Peter felt at being so close to Jesus. Of course, Peter wasn't always so open and vulnerable around Jesus. Not so long after today's gospel account, Peter was asked three times who Jesus was and he took the easy way out. “I do not know him. I do not know him. I do not know him.”

Today, on St. Mark's 138th homecoming Sunday we gather as Christ's body in this time and place, giving thanks for those who came before us, for the foundation they provided for our faith to develop and grow. For all these years, faithful disciples (and not so faithful ones) have each, at least once in their lives, pointed to Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of the living God. That pointing to Jesus as the source of all life has kindled faith in at least one other person and so the torch of faith has been passed down from believer to believer, all the way to us. These believers were ordinary people – farmers and homemakers and teachers and business owners – who were able to speak from the *have to's* of their lives that following Jesus was their most joy-filled *get to*.

The years have tumbled down to reach us. We are not so different from those original disciples. Our days are mostly filled with the *have to's*. Work, family, home, community. We all have obligations that demand much of us, so much so that we wonder sometimes if we have any more to give. Jesus knows that we do. When we descend from our head into our heart, we find Jesus there: loving and forgiving us, calling us to help him in his mission in this world, believing in us far more than we could believe in him. Such faith leads us to the same kind of *get to's* the first disciples had. We *get to* follow Jesus. We *get to* watch him preach and teach. We *get to* witness We get to proclaim that Jesus is Lord over this world. And then we *get to* do some of it ourselves: follow Jesus, teach and preach in his name, witness his healing power.

Here is how we are different from those first disciples, who gave up their lives to go on the road with Jesus. You and I get to do our discipleship through the *have to's* of our everyday lives. We *get to* embody the love of Christ in our work, in our interactions with our co-workers and our customers. We *get to* witness to Jesus' love in our love for our families, in our relationships with our schoolmates. We live out our respect for our neighbors by following rules so that others don't get hurt by our carelessness. We pay our taxes to support roads and schools and governments, so that our neighbors might live in the best possible environments. We don't take what is not ours, what others may have worked hard to get. We embody Christ's love in the grocery store, at the bank, in our encounters with people we know and with those we will never see again. We don't always get it right; in fact, our batting average as a whole and as individuals is often quite pathetic.

But God's love for us is not based on our batting average. It is based on a deep, deep well of love for God's people, a well that never runs out. It is in this well that we are baptized and made one of the body of Christ and nothing we ever say or do can get us kicked out of that body. When we get it right and especially when we don't, Jesus loves us and loves us and loves us because Jesus ***is*** love. Those who came before us and those who will follow us are all recipients of that glorious love, a love we don't have to work to get but receive out of God's sheer grace.

That is what those who came before us clung to. It is what we cling to in this frighteningly callous and unjust world in which we both *have to* and *get to* live.

Amen.

*Pentecost 13A St. Mark Homecoming*

*August 27, 2017*

*Floyd-Willis Lutheran Parish*

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