



Lakeside Sermons

Lakeside Baptist Church • Rocky Mount, North Carolina
Jody C. Wright, Senior Minister

SEPTEMBER 7, 2014
THE THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Good To Be Here I Corinthians 1:1-9; Matthew 17:1-8

Several years ago, on a Memorial Day weekend, I preached a sermon titled, “See You in September.” Many of you appreciated the sermon, but a few of you were shocked to think that I was encouraging everyone to have a good time and not give church a second thought until the fall. Of course, nothing was further from the truth. I knew that some of you were going to be away most of the summer at the beach or lake, visiting family or traveling the world. I wanted you to enjoy your time away, the to take advantage of the opportunity for rest and adventure that summer offers. The gist of the sermon, however, was: enjoy your summer; worship wherever you are; be here when you are in town; and come back in September renewed and ready to involve yourself in ministry. As I recall, some of you took me up on the offer—and have every year since.

On this first Sunday in September, Summer, for all intents and purposes, is over. I know that officially we have a couple of weeks before Fall arrives, but the children are back in school, college students are calling home less and less, football dominates the weekends, beach cottages are shuttered, and boats are out of the water. For most of us, summer is over.

Although the change of pace around here is dramatic, I always look forward to this time of year. Our programs and activities resume and, most important, our folks return to church. I feel like Simon Peter who, energized by the experience on the mountain, said, “Lord, it’s good to be here. Why don’t we stay a while?!”

Peter often gets a bad rap for things he said or did, and, on many occasions, it is deserved. He was rough around the edges, brazen at times, often impetuous, but fully committed to Jesus and his ministry. Even when at first he did not understand correctly what Jesus was doing, Peter was fully invested. He was a fisherman after all, and he was used to hard work, delayed results, and perseverance. He also knew a good thing when he saw it, and being on the mountain with Jesus, Moses, Elijah, James, and John was about the best thing that had ever happened to him. So he thought, why

not just stay a while. It seemed like a good idea because it was a good place to be.

In the same way, it is good to be here at Lakeside. In this sixtieth year of our ministry, we are in a good place. Some of you have been here since day one while others have only recently become a part of the Lakeside family. All of us have discovered, however, that Lakeside is composed of good folks, meaningful worship, valuable study, and important ministry.

Worship is the most important thing we do as Christians. It is our first and foremost calling. It was the spontaneous response of the disciples on the mountain. To worship is to express our gratitude and love to God. If we stop to think about it, since getting out of bed this morning, we have already received so many blessings that we could spend the rest of the day reflecting on them. Just making it out of bed some days is, in itself, a blessing. Add to that days and months and years and decades of gifts that we have received from God and the gratitude itself is endless. Moreover, worship offers an opportunity to better understand God and ourselves so that we can fully offer ourselves in service to God and one another.

As a family of faith, we engage in meaningful Bible study and exploration of what it means to be a Christian in this day and time. Sunday School, children's and youth activities, midweek studies, and special programs enable us to discover the ways in which our faith matters in day-to-day living. A Christian who thinks about her faith will more genuinely live her faith.

Living our faith is what Lakeside is all about. We seek to find ways in which we can express our faith in ministry to other people and in service throughout the community. If our faith does not affect the ways in which we conduct ourselves at school, at work, in the community, and at home, then it is not real faith at all. If we seek to love God with all of our heart and soul and mind and strength, we will inevitably love our neighbor as our self. A vibrant faith will worship and grow and serve. It is good to be here so that we can practice our faith together.

It is good to be here because we are family. We belong here. Dr. Luke Powery, Dean of the Chapel at Duke University, tells a story about a man he met at an Episcopal church in Atlanta ten years ago. He walked up to the man to speak to him and asked his name. The man responded, "Get out of here! Get out of here!"

Taken aback, Dr. Powery soon discovered that this man's given name was Clackston, but that he had grown to believe his name was "Get out of here!" because people were always saying that to him. Obviously, this gentleman wrestled with some mental issues, but he took his cues as to who he was from the ways in which other people treated him. He took his name from what they said to him.¹

If anything, no one who walks through our doors should ever think their name is "Get out of here." If anything, we all ought to think our name is "Welcome" for that is the first thing we should hear at Lakeside. Hospitality is a key Old Testament value and Jesus taught and practiced the virtue of hospitality at every turn. Christian fellowship is about welcome and acceptance, challenge and change, and making one another feel welcome and valued is integral to what the church is all about.

Last week, Cassandra Baker shared with me a quote from an article which included remembrances by former students of Maya Angelou. Nicole Little, who graduated from Wake Forest University a year ago, commented:

"In class, Dr. Angelou made us learn each other's names. She wanted us to understand how you feel when someone calls your name across the room. She wanted us to experience what it meant to have your chest swell with pride because someone remembered your name. Sometimes she asked us to share what was going on in our lives. She listened. In those moments, she was studying us and what we could contribute to the group and to society at large."²

I believe that God wants us to be in a fellowship where we know each other's names. Just as God revealed the divine name to Moses out of the burning bush, so we are invited to share our names, and thus our character, with one another. As we get to know one another and trust one another in the church, God is studying us to learn what we can contribute to this fellowship and to the world beyond. That is the character and calling of the church.

This table represents God's welcome to us all. Sharing a meal with someone is an intimate experience. In the breaking of bread we break down

¹Luke Powery, "Reflections on the Lectionary: Sunday, August 31," *The Christian Century* (August 20, 2014): 19.

²Nicole Little, Program Coordinator with the art-based nonprofit, *Authoring Action*, as quoted in Kim McGrath, "Remembering Dr. Maya Angelou," *Wake Forest University News Center* (June 2, 2014); available online at: <http://news.wfu.edu/2014/06/02/remembering-dr-maya-angelou/>.

our defenses; in the sharing of food we share ourselves. That is exactly what God has done through Jesus Christ. In coming to live among us, God shared himself with us. In giving of himself completely, God demonstrated his love for us. And in rising again to life, God offered his hope for us.

It is good to be here in a place and among friends where we can worship God, study the Bible, explore our faith, and minister in Christ's name. It is good to be here where we are welcome and find a safe place to discover God's call on our lives. It is good to be here where we can experience rest and renewal as well as insight and challenge. It is good to be here because, as Simon Peter discovered, we can't remain here forever. There are needs waiting outside that big window. There are needs just beyond the threshold of our door. There are people who long to be welcomed and introduced to the One who knows us all by name. It is good to be here and I am glad we are!

September 7, 2014

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession

We gather here week by week, Holy God, because in the midst of the challenges and tensions and uncertainties of life, we know that in this sacred place and among these our brothers and sisters is where we should be. We gather to experience your presence through the nurturing of your Holy Spirit, to hear an inspiring word or melody that might cause our hearts to soar above the mundane concerns of the day, and to receive an encouraging word or embrace that will reassure us that we are cared for and accepted. We gather because in this world of conflict and confusion, we need to be reminded of the peace which only you can bring and to hear again the good news that your truth will set us free.

Even while we come with gratitude for the abundance of these gifts and every blessing you offer to us, O Lord, we confess that we also come with reservations. We are called to be your disciples, but yours can be a costly discipleship, sometimes requiring of us more than we bargained for. You gather us in, the proud and the strong as well as the lost and forsaken, calling us by name and promising to hold us forever, yet we often feel inadequate to live out the demands of the gospel. You call us to extend welcome and a cup of cold water to others in your name, yet our suspicion of the other causes us to hesitate to be hospitable and our scarcity mentality convinces us that our resources are inadequate to meet the needs around us. We hear the difficult truths of your word and are confronted by the teachings of Jesus which challenge our assumptions and nudge us from our comfortable places. We sense the stirring of your Spirit who will not leave well enough alone, who nestles deep within our souls and seeks to transform us in ways that are both inviting and unsettling. And so we begin to wonder whether we have the strength or the courage to claim the name of Christ and to live as your disciples at all.

Create us anew, Loving God, that we might recognize and live the fullness of your image within us. Cleanse and redeem us, Merciful Christ, that we might become suitable vessels, fragile though we are, to carry your gospel to the world you came to love and serve. Nourish us at this table and empower us, Renewing Spirit, that we might be equipped to respond to the needs around us out of the abundance we have been given. Grant us the strength to do the work of discerning your will. Grant us the wisdom to reject anything that hinders the joyful and abundant life you intend for us. And grant us the courage to reach out beyond ourselves to extend mercy wherever we find suffering, always remembering that in your kingdom, we must lose ourselves in order to find our true life in you.

We give witness to our faith that we do not travel this journey alone, as we pray in the name of the Risen Christ who came to dwell among us and by the power of the Holy Spirit who abides with us still. Amen.

Elizabeth J. Edwards, Associate Minister