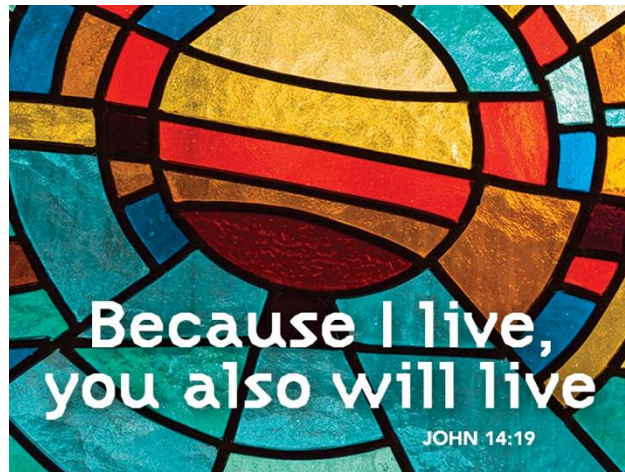


**Sunday, May 17, 2020**  
**SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER**  
**GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH**  
**SOMERS POINT, NJ 08244**  
**INTERIM PASTOR: REV. KEVIN HILGENDORF**



"Be near me Lord Jesus I ask you stay,  
Close by me forever and love me I pray,  
Bless all the dear children in your tender care,  
And fit us for heaven to live you there." Third verse Away in the Manger #277 ELW

Sometimes I sing this verse after Home Communion. The member notices its familiarity and I respond you know it as 'Away in the Manger' this is the third verse. It inspires us to know Jesus is near us.

I like this, "it's not where you are going, it's who you are with." It's about our relationship with God. "To start a relationship you must communicate. To maintain a relationship, continue to communicate." In John's Gospel, "Faith is a relationship with a 'Living Being' otherwise faith is reduced to the memory of a Jesus who died long ago." Commented Craig R. Koester, Professor of the New Testament, "for it is the Spirit who makes the presence of the living Jesus and the Father known. You are not alone you have God's promise in the words of Jesus and in the presence of the Holy Spirit our Advocate."

Pastor Bill Dohle shared this perspective with his family. "Wait here, I said, I'll be right back. "Running into the store with kids in the car is never easy, even if there are just a few things that I need to grab. When my kids were younger, I dragged them inside. But now that they're teenagers, I can leave them in the car, run in, and get what I need. They know from experience their father isn't abandoning them."

Jesus said, "I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you." Jesus' disciples have his promise he would return. We are here on this earth without the physical presence of Jesus. Our fears may see his absence as abandonment. To calm our fears, Jesus has given us the Holy Spirit who reminds us of what Jesus said and teaches us new insights, helping us until Jesus returns.

St. Paul assures the church of the Thessalonians (1:4-5), "We know brothers and sisters beloved by God that He has chosen you. Because our message of the Gospel came to you not in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of persons we proved to be among you for your sake."

In May's "Living Lutheran" Pastor Frank Honeycutt's "Backward Testimony" is about St. Peter's resurrection story: a man once utterly dead in his shame comes back to life and speaks. To calm our fears, Jesus has given us the Holy Spirit who reminds us of Jesus words and teaches us new insights. "Backward Testimony" what's that? Pastor Honeycutt suggests we read the third article of the Apostles Creed backwards. I will start with Luther's explanation. By the way this is a first for me...This is most certainly true. On the last day the Holy Spirit will raise me and all the dead and will give me and all believers in Christ eternal life. Daily in this Christian church the Holy Spirit abundantly forgives all sins - mine and those of all believers. I believe that by my own understanding or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him, but instead the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, made me Holy and kept me in the true faith, just as he calls, gathers, enlightens and makes the whole Christian church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one common, true faith. And the life everlasting, the resurrection of the body, the forgiveness of sins, the communion of saints, the holy Catholic Church, I believe in the Holy Spirit.

This is worth repeating, "we are the result of what God did on Easter!" We are not alone. God is present in Jesus' word and the Holy Spirit. Now the peace which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus!