

Sermons from West Denmark



West Denmark Lutheran Church Luck, Wisconsin westdenmark.org

Fifth Sunday of Easter

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By Mike Miles

[John 14:1-14](#)

It's so good to be back home after our annual pilgrimage to Kansas City, joining with sisters and brothers from all over the Midwest for our annual Faith and Resistance retreat. I'm not used to being in a big city any more. It's one thing to go into Minneapolis for the day to spend time with the grand kids or see friends and maybe go to a show or Twins game. It's another to be in a blighted neighborhood where people are sleeping on the sidewalk outside of the building you are meeting in because it's where un-housed folks come to eat, shower, and hang out in a welcoming environment.

It always invokes in me what I imagined Jesus' disciples felt leaving the familiarity of family and daily work when they got caught up in the hub bub of a holy man talking liberation from an occupied way of life. The next thing you know, you're on the road, getting into awkward situations talking religion and politics with everyone from the Black Panthers to politicians and bishops trying to keep a lid on the social order. And if that's not enough, your guru has magical powers that heal the sick, raise the dead, and feed thousands of people out of thin air. Could he be the one they were looking for to upend the occupation? Was freedom and fortune just around the corner?

Three years of life on the road together convinced them that the moment was coming. No, the moment was now! They made their way into Jerusalem and the excitement was palpable. There seemed to be a network in place, people were joining them, and Jesus even went to the Temple, to the seat of power and threw the money changers out on their ears. Before they knew it, they were led to a secret meeting place where they could plan their next moves. But what they heard next took their breath away and they fell into utter despair.

Jesus told them that one of them was going to betray him, Peter was going to disown him that very night, and he was leaving them, going to a place where they would not be able to

follow. If that wasn't enough, he lays on them a new commandment, that they are to love one another as he loved them. But wait just a bloody minute they think. You just told us that you are abandoning us. You don't love us, you're leaving us! What the hell?!

Then his narcissism really begins to shine through. "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to God except through me. If you really knew me, you would know God as well. Don't you believe that I am in God and God is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. It is God living in me who is doing the work. Anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. They will do even greater things than me because I am going to God. I will do whatever you ask in my name so that I can bring glory to God.

The difference between the synoptic Gospels and John's version, is that in Matthew, Mark, and Luke you mostly just get the facts about what happened that night. John has Jesus preaching to us in what is called the Farewell Discourse. It's four chapters long and we'll continue looking at this for the next two weeks. The rest of the facts from that fateful night are mostly the same.

You can see why the disciples would be exhausted and that they would run away and go into hiding when it was all over. The Resurrection hadn't happened yet so they must have been feeling that they had been duped. But what about the miracles they must have been thinking. We saw what he did for Lazarus. How can it be over? Is it really over?

Well, it clearly wasn't over and they finally came to grips with what the three-year long road trip was about. It was their version of boot camp and they realized that he had not been talking to them about the physical way to go somewhere, but that the way is Eternal life. Eternal life is not an insurance policy to get into heaven, it is living a way of life that is True no matter when or where it is lived. Whatever circumstances get thrown at someone living Eternal life, they will be able to navigate it as Jesus did.

Eternal life is living in the power of love instead of the love of power. An early name for those people who were living Eternal life was The Way. And the people living The Way were not doing it on their own, they had received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. That's why Jesus told them it would be better for all of them if he left. The question for those of us trying to live the Way today is, how seriously do we take the in-dwelling of the Holy Spirit in our lives?

Come back to Kansas City with me for just a moment. Those of us who gathered for the weekend were a motley crew of Jesus wannabes if there ever was one. We were young, old, urban, rural, male, female, non binary, multi denominational, multi ethnic, un housed, democrats, communists, anarchists, vegans, and carnivores. No capitalists, no apologies. Everyone wanted to love their neighbors as themselves and felt that was impossible with a government spending over \$1trillion of taxpayer money to make hydrogen bombs "safer and more usable".

We prayed together, ate together, laughed way too much together, grieved together and together we came up with a plan to convince 7,000 people to quit their jobs fabricating Armageddon. It was all going as planned until the tornado sirens started blaring at 5:30 am

in complete stillness and dark. We were in the middle of nowhere, with no place to go, when the skies opened up, rain was blowing sideways, and then the hail came.

The best we had was, "Thy will be done" and fortunately for us we didn't blow somewhere over the rainbow(seeing as we were in wizard of oz land). After reconnoitering it was decided we're not going to get any wetter and they were still making bombs, so we went to the front gate where 9 of us offered ourselves up to the authorities after apologizing to them for the inconvenient circumstances that had happened to all of us. They placed us under arrest and got us our citations as quickly as they could. They even let us put Al back in one of our cars that was right there to keep him warm and they door dashed his ticket to him while wishing him well.

After years of doing this with the same cast of characters and an administration that had threatened to obliterate an entire, ancient civilization, our arresting officers wished us well and said, "we'll see you next year". I had to be a wise guy and leave them with, "hopefully we won't have to be back next year because people will see how sensible it would be not to build hydrogen bombs and we could spend a trillion dollars on health care instead". We all laughed, waved goodbye and drove off into the sunrise of a day that had become quite lovely.

So is what we did what Jesus was talking about when he said that anyone doing what he was doing would actually be doing greater things than he did? We certainly were trying to be peacemakers ala the Sermon on the Mount. He flat out said that peacemakers would be blessed. Pete Hegseth considers himself to be a peacemaker using all the weapons he has at his disposal to dispatch evil enemies. He specifically, overtly prays in the name of Jesus:

"Break the teeth of the ungodly. By the blast of your anger, let the evil perish. Let their bulls go down to slaughter for their day has come, the time of their punishment. Pour out your wrath upon those who plot vain things and blow them away like chaff before the wind. Give them the wisdom in every decision, endurance for the trial ahead, unbreakable unity, and overwhelming violence of action against those who deserve no mercy. Preserve their lives, sharpen their resolve, and let justice be executed swiftly and without remorse that evil may be driven back and wicked souls delivered to the eternal damnation prepared for them." In Jesus' name we pray. Look it up.

What the Secretary doesn't seem to know is that Jesus calls us to be incarnations of love just as he was. He is not implying that his name is an incantation to do whatever we want to do just because we say the magic words "in Jesus' name". In the bible, doing something "in the name of" signifies acting with their authority, according to their will, or as their representative.

For us to do even greater things than he did is a nod to Jesus' belief in us. He got the ball rolling some 2,000 years ago (with the distinct advantage of being fully God and fully human), passed off the responsibility to his circle of besties who made it through boot camp, and they unleashed the rest of us, across the globe and throughout time, to give people the tools to become fully realized, loving, human beings.

Clarence Jordan's translation of Hebrews 1:11 tells us all we need to know about God's expectations of us: "Faith is turning your dreams into deeds, it is betting your life on the unseen realities."

My dream on that crazy morning outside the gates of hell was to faithfully practice resurrection. The best I could do when things seemed pretty bleak was to lean into a song and I'm going to need your help to sing it. "Hold on, hold on, my dear ones here comes the dawn."