

## This Is Not Rocket Science Acts 2:1-8

The title of this sermon, "This Is Not Rocket Science." The title was chosen several months ago for reasons that are no longer clear to me. But I do remember that what I hoped to do in this sermon on Pentecost Sunday, the birthday of the Church, was to talk about the Church, particularly because this is also Confirmation Sunday as these young people Kylie, Kate, and Klaire will be joining the Church, as simply as I can.

The expression, "**This is not rocket science**," is used when somebody has made something too complicated, much more than it needs to be, or for some other reason, fails to comprehend what is relatively simple to understand. The reason I know the phrase is because it has been addressed to me with some frequency. It occurred to me that anyone who belongs to the Church ought to be able to articulate what the Church is here for, what it means to belong to the Church, and why they belong to it. So I want to try that this morning on this Pentecost Sunday, the birthday of the Church, and say just three things about the Church.

**The first is that the Church is part of a community of faith that stretches back four thousand years, clear back to the time of Abraham and Sarah. Jesus is the center of our faith, but not the beginning of our faith. The beginning of our faith goes clear back to Abraham and Sarah.**

It is just amazing. Before Abraham, everybody in the world believed that the gods, or God, were separated from us, foreign to us, and indifferent to us. After Abraham, God is revealed as concerned about us. And what was most surprising and shocking of all, was God is gracious toward us. The purpose of religion ever since Abraham has been to have faith, to have trust in God.

What God did for the Jews in Abraham, God also did for all people in Jesus Christ. We believe as Christians that God sent Jesus into the world for the same reason that God spoke to Abraham two thousand years before Jesus, to tell us that he loves us, that he wants us to be a part of his family. **So just as the response to the old covenant with Abraham was to live a life of faith, trusting the promise, so the response to the new covenant given to us through Jesus is to live a life of faith, trusting God's promise in Jesus.** The central act of worship in the Christian church are the three Means of Grace, God's Holy Word, Holy Baptism and Holy Communion.

So Abraham and Jesus are there as the cornerstones of our faith. But there are many others who are a part of this heritage as well. There are prophets, apostles, saints, martyrs, philosophers and theologians. I like to think of those people as a part of our heritage as benchmarks.

That is what a heritage is, a collection of benchmarks where people who have gone before us have left their testimony to enable us in our journey. **A benchmark is that mark that surveyors make to indicate the starting point in mapping out a territory. They cut a benchmark into a rock, or some other durable material, so that people coming by years later will be able to find that benchmark as the starting place to begin their journey, to begin mapping out their territory.**

**That is why we recite the creeds, both the modern and the ancient creeds. That is why we celebrate the Christian year. That is why we lift up the holy days of faith, because they are all benchmarks, left there by those people who have completed their journey before us, a testimony of their experience to guide us on our way.**

Someday you will discover that your life is like an Exodus. You will discover that life is a journey from where you are to where you want to be, or to where God wants you to be. Often to get there you will have to go through a desert, through a wilderness, or a time of suffering. That is when you learn what life is all about. That is when you learn that you are dependent on the God who guides you through difficult times.

Someday you will discover what Paul discovered--then Augustine after Paul, and Luther after Augustine, and John Wesley after Luther--**that we cannot save ourselves, but we are saved by God's grace alone.** The Holy Spirit, which is what we look at today on the Day of Pentecost proceeds from the Father and the Son to reveal to us the truth about Jesus Christ and God's Grace for each of us.

The Holy Spirit is there to explain for you how you got through a time in your life when you didn't think you were going to make it. You look back on that time and you realize that there was something, someone, some power that was guiding you through it. That is the meaning of the Holy Spirit. That power in our life that we cannot see, but we can feel it moving us through our lives.

As young people you are still seeking what life is all about, what your life may look like in the years ahead. As seekers you have many questions about life and faith as well. That is why the Church is here. **The Church is here for seekers. That is why the Church has a heritage that stretches all the way back to the**

**beginning of faith. So when you move into territories in your life where you have not been before, and you find yourself confused, or questioning, or speechless, you will find here in church a language, and symbols, and stories, that will guide you on your journey.**

**Secondly, to be the Church is to be a fellowship of caring.** The Church believed that its mission in the world was to establish a new community, one that was different than every other community. Christians were to be together in the world with a quality of life that would attract other people to them.

The Church had a special word for it for this fellowship of caring. **They called it, "koinonia." It is a Greek word that is translated as "fellowship." But it is a special fellowship. It is a fellowship of caring for one another the way Christ has cared for us. And it is a love that is expressed not only in words, it is a love that is expressed in deeds.** It is why when we get together we always pray for one another, **"Our mutual burdens bear,"** because we are to be a caring fellowship. You cannot be a Christian unless you are a part of is beloved community." There is no such thing as solitary Christianity. Christianity is a fellowship of caring. So to be the Church is to have a heritage of meaning, and to be in a fellowship of caring. And finally, to be the Church is to have a mission of serving.

The Church took the fellowship of caring inside the Church outside the Church into a ministry of service. That is where hospitals came from. Hospitals were started by Christians. The word "hospital" comes from "hospitality." ***In the New Testament the Christians are mandated, "Practice hospitality."*** And they did it.

It is the Church that began the universities and the schools in this world to lift people out of the darkness and ignorance of illiteracy, so that every child on this earth would have the opportunity to reach the fulfillment of promise that God intended for them in the creation. The Church founded universities and schools everywhere because they remembered Jesus' words, "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

Some critics of the Church will say, if the Church has been here for two thousand years, how come the world is not a better place? I say, the world is a better place because the Church has been here. I can't imagine what the world would be like if it hadn't been for the Church.

But it is not perfect. It is frail. It is a human institution. I have in my memory an old prayer for the Church that goes like this:

The answer lies in the meaning of this day, the Day of Pentecost. At Pentecost we remember that the Spirit enters the lives of ordinary men and women, and empowers them to do extraordinary things. At Pentecost the Spirit entered the Church, a stumbling, frail, sinful institution. The Holy Spirit is with the church to renew it, so that even today, after two thousand plus years later, it offers a heritage of meaning stretching clear back to Abraham. It offers a fellowship of caring open to all. And it offers a mission of serving that can change the world.

Today, Kylie, Kate and Klaire you too are added to the church in a very meaningful way. You will grow in faith, learning from the heritage of the church and those who have come before you. You will add your own personal marks on the church as you care for others you come into contact with. Each one of us today, including you three fine young ladies are benchmarks and part of the heritage of Trinity Lutheran Church as other come into our sphere of influence now and in the next 50 years.