

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost
July 19, 2009

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Isn't it amazing how things just keep changing and changing. The truism that the only constant is change seems to be so prevalent these days. I don't know about you -- I'm guessing some of you are doing what I am doing, thinking back and then seeing a memory and seeing how much has changed from that time forward. I'm remembering a time when I drove into a parking lot and parked my car to head to the hardware store. This is about ten years ago; I was listening to the local news in Plymouth, Michigan, which is a suburb of Detroit and the news said Ford Motor Company has announced their quarterly profits, at that time it was always a quarterly profit, 1.2 billion dollars. Wow! a billion dollars a quarter is nice! Profit! And GM and Chrysler were doing the same thing. Now ten years later the car companies are completely different than ten years ago. Ford seems OK because they got that 22 billion dollar loan early. Who would have thought ten years ago in that parking lot for me that I could ever have imagined that ten years later some state senator and part time law professor would be running the car company out of the oval office, which is kinda what's going on these days. I mean it's really different right now and all of you have had to manage your lives within this enormous change that our economy and other factors are causing. So it's interesting, isn't it that we go back and start with the scripture today from Jeremiah – two thousand seven hundred years ago, Jeremiah speaks these words to the people of Israel who were undergoing enormous change, change that was disorientating; change that was sort of challenging them to stay anchored in their faith. Jeremiah does this by looking back further, three hundred years even further – three thousand years ago from now. When Nathan, the prophet, talked about the King David becoming a king and bringing the people of Israel into a relationship, a covenantal relationship with God that was based on God's promise of fidelity. Three thousand years ago the people of Israel woke up to that reality of God that God offers us faithfulness, steadfastness and that whatever will happen, whatever change we face, God will be there. Three hundred years after that promise was offered, Jeremiah had to remind the people of Israel that through David and that promise God is faithful. Two thousand years ago Paul says to the people of Ephesians, "you are now people in the covenant of promise, you live within that covenant as well and now two thousand year after that, today we remind ourselves through scripture that we are people of that promise, that we have received that same inheritance from God though God's people that assurance that God is faithful and God is with us no matter what. Now it's fascinating to me that that scripture comes to us on the day that Kurt and Jenny are leaving. So we know we're going to be O K even though we grieve their loss. Now we will celebrate as well. Isn't it interesting how grief and joy includes happiness and sadness all mixed in together So we will celebrate their ministry with us here. We'll celebrate right after church in the parish hall. So join us. But even as we celebrate we let our hearts open to the sadness, the sadness that comes from saying goodbye and we say that to them today. Now we know our relationships can continue with them, but they'll be in a different way and in a different factor, so we say goodbye today and we face yet more change especially in a place our church

community where we look for stability and steadfastness, so that scripture comes to us as a soothing promise from God that even as we face changes outside these walls and changes within these walls that we are O.K. And those words from Jeremiah are backed up from the words from Mark. Let me just stop and ask you a question. Have you ever been tempted to take different parts of scripture and put them together to prove a point? The confession will come later – just think about it in your heart. In seminary we called that “proof texting”. You find the piece you like, you pull it out and then you point to it and say “see right here”. And I want you to know that today our dear crafters of the Lectionary have done exactly that with our Gospel reading. If you look at it, the Holy Gospel Mark: Chapter six, verses 30-34, 53-56. Don’t you wonder what happened in between verses 35 and 52? I’ll tell you; Jesus fed the five thousand. Now why would they leave that out? That’s about as powerful a scriptural story as we can find. So let’s back up a little bit in this Gospel of Mark to find the meaning here because I think it helps us today. If you go back a little bit right before the reading we start with, Jesus and his disciples hear the news of the beheading of John the Baptist. So you can imagine the shock they were in at that point. Their whole world had to change. John the Baptist was the forerunner, the one who went ahead. Have you ever driven down a mountain road at night? Isn’t it nicer to have a car in front of you? You can borrow their headlights; you can see when they turn. It’s always easier to have someone in front finding the way and then suddenly those lights go dark and you’re on your own. That must have been the experience of Jesus with the disciples, but there was another experience going on at the same time, because Mark tells us immediately before that Jesus sent out the disciples two by two and they practiced their ministry. Remember they go out into the surrounding hills and countryside and they heal and they teach; they’re just coming back from that, they’re full of all the power of ministry that they enjoyed. They’re ready to tell their stories, kinda go away and tell their stories, they hear about John the Baptist and ahh -- what is this? Sometimes when we have a moment of strength we think it should just build and build and build and grow stronger and stronger and then we go into a period of diminishment. So the disciples were right in that place, full of themselves and then the air goes right out from under them. Jesus naturally as their teacher and their shepherd wants to take them away and talk with them and pray with them and listen to them and probably comfort them so he tries to but as he is trying to do that they can’t get away from the crowd, more and more come, five thousand and more. So the disciples in their consternation and I imagine -- almost panic – say to Jesus -- in the feeding of the five thousand - Jesus, there’s a lot of people here and there’s no place to buy any food, what shall we do? And you remember what Jesus says: “you feed them”; they are back in the training ground – the practice of ministry. They have no comfort, they are working hard and then they try to go away again, you can pick it up here in the Gospel we have today. And more crowds come and they turn towards the crowds again and again and again. If you look in scripture, it seems like every time Jesus wants to go away he gets pulled back in. He turns and he responds. Jesus has his own idea; the need of the crowd comes upon him, so he turns. The scripture today reminds us that Jesus is in that same inheritance line as David. And so Jesus is ministering within that covenant of promise anchoring his ministry into God’s faithfulness for us, no matter what happens, no matter what changes, God will be there and Jesus’ life especially today in the scripture we have today shows us how to walk through – walk through life -- especially in those

times when the heavenly banquet doesn't sort of open up and spread itself before us. Have you ever prayed to God and gotten the answer that you didn't want? You know some people say that God doesn't answer prayers; well sometimes the answer is "no" or "I know you want to go away on a little retreat but you need to go over here and work with the crowd". This is Jesus showing us that steadfastness, this part of being people of the promise; that sometimes life doesn't go our way, that sometimes we make a great plan that doesn't work out, but we are still within that covenant of promise and we still have that faithful God that is there with us come what may. You think about it here at Trinity. A year ago we were celebrating that Jenny was joining us on staff. We were right in the thick of things with Kurt. We were rolling and we knew that God was blessing us and now Kurt and Jenny are leaving; we've taken some other measures this year to secure our community and we know faithfully that God is with us. A lot has changed, but we still live within that covenant of promise and you still have that as you walk out these doors. I was raised in Chicago, in the suburbs, but I like to imagine that I'm a farm boy, that I grew up on the farm, because my grandfather had a farm ninety miles away and I'd go out there and play. Now on farms you work, so I'm not a farm boy, I'm a fake farm boy, but I still claim it, because farms are fun and this farm that my grandfather had was really fun; he did all the work and we did all the play. One of the things I learned out on that flat Illinois farm land is farmers have a prayer; I've shared it with you before I think, but it bears sharing again. It's a very complicated prayer; it goes like this: the farmer looks at the field and all the work that's to be done and prays to God: God, please move the rocks from the field and then the farmer gets up off the prayer mat, goes out in the field and moves the rocks. Then at night comes back in and thanks God for moving the rocks. I believe in this time we are all farmers who are praying to God to move the rocks from the field and then we get up and we move the rocks. God works through us because we are steadfast and we live in that place of promise and we know that change comes all the time. And so tonight when you go home and give God thanks for the day I know that you'll thank God for moving the rocks from your field.