

Grace and peace to you in the name of our risen savior, Jesus Christ, who gives us his peace. Amen.

If you haven't already heard... we elected a new bishop this past week at our synod assembly.

Bishop-elect Julie Schneider-Thomas comes from the outskirts of the Grand Rapids area, where she served two congregations that are in a formal paired relationship.

In church lingo... we call that a 2-point, and she has been with them for nearly 30 years.

As excited as the assembly was that the Holy Spirit was calling us into something new... there were those for whom Pr Julie's election was a cause for grieving... a cause for troubled hearts.

Among them, of course, are our outgoing bishop, Criag Satterlee, and those who serve on his staff, Pr Chrisy Bright and Pr Kjersten Sullivan... also Bp. Satterlee's wife and daughter.

The Holy Spirit is now calling all of them forward into something new, but to what... they don't yet know.

It's understandably disorienting.

And at the end of Bishop-elect Julie's acceptance speech, she left the podium... but then came running back to say one last thing...

She said she saw the wide eyes of her people... people from not only one congregation, but from two... who just realized they have lost their pastor... their leader and shepherd... of 30 years.

She saw their wide, troubled eyes... and her heart just broke.

I felt that ache with her.

In just a few short months, I have fallen deeply in love with this congregation... and with joy in my heart, I'm excited to share my life with you for years to come... to deepen our relationship over the gift of time.

And so, I can only imagine what they all must have felt in that moment...

The thrill of hope for where a new leader might guide our synod... a leader they know and love... up against the terrible ache of loss, knowing that their stability... and the patterns of life in those congregations are suddenly upended.

The truth is... life could change for any of us in a moment's notice... disorienting us... and challenging what we thought we knew.

Leaving our hearts... troubled, and afraid.

And into this disorientation, Jesus arrives with a word of peace.

Do not let your hearts be troubled, he says... and do not be afraid.

He tells them that yes, he is leaving them... but he is not leaving them alone.

So be at peace...

Jesus is going back to the Father, but we have the Holy Spirit... our advocate... our God with us.

The Holy Spirit is with us always, to guide us... and to remind us of what Jesus taught us... to pour God's love into us so we can share that love with the world.

The Holy Spirit is with us... to ease our troubled hearts... and to give us... peace.

Jesus tells his disciples this *before* his death and resurrection...

This particular passage takes place after their last supper... after Judas has betrayed Jesus and gone out into the night... and after Jesus predicts Peter's denial of him...

He's telling them this now... so that when the moment comes, they will remember his words.

He's trying to prepare them as best he can for what is to come...

Imploring them to remember... remember that when you feel troubled... when you are afraid... I am still with you.

Our advocate... God's Holy Spirit... is still with us... always with us.

These words are for us, as well... remember what Jesus promised us... we will never be abandoned.

Our election for bishop went all the way to the fifth and final ballot... the field narrowing with each round.

And before each round of voting... after passing out the ballots, we prayed together as an assembly.

We prayed for the Holy Spirit to be present in our choice, and we breathed in that breath of God around us...

The intention of this prayer was not to call the Holy Spirit to us... we were not imploring the Holy Spirit to come and be by our side.

This prayer was for us... it was for our understanding... it was so that WE would become aware of the presence of God... that was already there.

This prayer... was to help us *remember* Jesus' promise.

This prayer was intended to help us open our hearts to God in the Spirit... our Advocate... who is with us always.

...our Christ, by our side... giving us peace... not as the world gives, but as Jesus gives... the peace that comes from remembering Jesus's promise that we would *never* be abandoned by God.

It was only after giving thanks for the Spirit of God with us, that we cast each vote.

And so, while the results mean there are changes ahead... we know that Christ is with us through them all.

There was another story I wanted to share with you today... another example of how present the Spirit of God is with us in our troubling, disorienting moments.

...those moments when we might be tempted to feel that God has abandoned us.

This happened just a couple of days ago... and I want to start by saying that no one was hurt...

But my friend and colleague, Pastor Kara of Trinity Lutheran in Hillsdale, lost her home, her camper, and her husband's truck in a fire on Thursday.

Like I said, everyone is ok... unharmed... physically, at least, including their dog... no one was home at the time.

But their property is a total loss.

And just as Rich recently experienced after the storms, they have been showered with offers to help in whatever way they might need.

And to everyone, she has the same response... She is beyond thankful that no one was hurt, and they have insurance.

She is shocked, for sure... no one expects this... but she is absolutely grounded by Christ's peace and presence.

So, her request to everyone who offers is that they refocus their intentions toward the youth and young adults of our synod.

You see... at the assembly, after we elected the new bishop, we also had to pass the new budget.

The synod council put forward a budget that cut the amounts allocated for nearly all of our ministries, including support for the synod Youth & Young Adult Table, our Campus Ministries, and Living Water Ministries.

Pastor Kara had moved for an addendum to the budget to reinstate the financial support for our youth and young adult ministry programs.

She argued that we cannot claim the importance of youth and young adults in our church while also cutting our support for them.

After much debate, the addendum passed... which reinstated the \$14,000 cut from the lines supporting youth and young adult ministries...

It was... a leap of faith...

Because it came without any recent historical pattern of mission support from congregations to justify that extra spending.

She was pretty much on edge after pushing the synod into possible debt.

Still, Pastor Kara knew the Holy Spirit was with us in that room, guiding our decisions and moving our hearts toward God's will.

She trusted that when we follow God's call, God will provide.

She could not have known, however, that in less than a week, her faith in God's provision would be put to the test.

But I hear her... I hear the ache in her voice. She pushed for the assembly to do the right thing, even before knowing how we would accomplish it.

She knew that her heart was troubled, but that the Spirit of Christ was with us...

So, when facing a life-altering event... the kind of event that might leave one feeling abandoned... her faith and her resolve became stronger.

They are unharmed, and they will recover... and so she is redirecting all the attention back toward the movement of the Holy Spirit at the assembly.

And she is at peace.

We'll be talking more about this call to support youth and young adult ministries in the months to come... but as we have these conversations, I want you to remember...

Remember Jesus' words to us... his promise...

Jesus said to his disciples... as he says to us...

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

Christ is with us always, through good times and challenging times... in happy times and in sorrow.

The promise of Jesus is that God's Spirit is with us always, surrounding us with peace, and equipping us for the work ahead.

So we will not let our hearts be troubled... and we will not be afraid.

Amen.