

**“Rudderless” Pastor Ken Hilston, Pentecost Sunday, 2022
at Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Norwood.**

please place your bulletin in page 1162 of the hymnal

Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

There supposedly was a young man who was really enamored with this young teen lady, and wanted to be with her forever. Of course, that is a huge investment in one's life, so he wanted to be sure. Absolutely sure! He needed proof.

Finally, on one date, he bolstered up the courage to test the truth of the relationship. Sitting in lover's lane, he asks her, "do you really love me?" She said, "yes." So he reaches into the back seat of the car to pull out a blood pressure cup. She look's very puzzled, as most young women are of boys of that age, anytime.

He explains his simple test. I want to take your blood pressure reading, before and after we kiss, to see if what say, is the truth. Of course, she wrapped the blood pressure cup around his neck and walked home.

Ridiculous, of course. It might have registered something, but not necessarily love.

Of course, love cannot be quantified or proved, or if it did, it would not be love. Or if you look at it, as a test in the right way, the test results would not be in, until after our lives were over: a couple's whole life together: the best barometer, the only true test.

Living, trusting, loving in all kinds of circumstances, is a love that grows, only over a long distance, BUT it is NOT a test. Yes, blood is involved, a lot of sweat and blood, trusting, over and over again. And, it will not always make much sense.

At rock bottom, if you look at love analytically, the flesh and blood aliveness of it, disappears. It is a mystery, unexplainable, and should not be, explainable. And if you could make sense of it, it is not love. You either are in love, or not! Love and proof have very little in common.

The big question: Why would our Lord love me or even care for me? How can simple bread and ordinary wine convey the message of everlasting love, or drops of water on my head, maybe not even clean water?

How could our Lord commune Judas or any of the disciples at the Last Supper? How could Moses, an anger-ridden murderer, be lifted up as a deliverer? What did our Lord God see in Paul, the persecutor? What does make sense? Should it make sense?

After creation started to fall apart, Noah goes on the ride of a lifetime. There was no itinerary, very little notice or reason, looking at a boat ride on “land,” or ever building a boat on land, where there was NO water to float it, YET.

The floods seemingly came to wreck everything, to give the disobedient people what they assumed they deserved. Noah wonders: “I can maybe build this strange boat, but I’m no captain. When have I even been near a great body of water? I can’t even swim.” Noah liked to protest!

All of this sounds like directions from a madman who knows nothing about anything. This was a jigsaw puzzle where no puzzle piece fits any other, and no box top cover to see how it even should look.

To top it off, the Lord God said, “of course, bring all signs of life aboard this ‘lifeboat,’ but, NO RUDDER. This boat will be rudderless. In My presence, you will be totally at My mercy. You will not even touch the helm. I am taking you for a ride: trust me!!”

“I will put you into my faith ‘boot camp’ to prepare you for your life’s faith journey: how it should look, where YOU are not in full control. If you are in control, even a rudder will not help. Trust me!”

Pentecost is the beginning of a wild faith ride, where we are taken, where we, do not plot the course. Like Noah, we will not plot our life’s course. God asks: “You think I could take a risk with you? You are taking the risk with ME, the Lord God. I would never give you the helm in a total jaunt into the dark, where you just might think, you know what you are doing, but know less than nothing.”

“Do you trust Me, or do you trust yourself?”

Pentecost: the ride of faith is rudderless! At least what we would use as a rudder!!! If we were charting the course of our faith life, it would be the equivalent of starting the trip holding the map upside down, and backward. It is not a matter of our skills! It is a matter of where, and with WHOM, we place our faith and trust.

Starting a great well-planned journey, where the first turn in the road is wrong, means it will be a failure. Yes, life is scary at the best of times, but when we are “Captain” of our soul, we will end up like the Titanic: a bold name for a ship going nowhere, fast, except down.

Of course, there are plenty of aspects of the faith where we are somewhat handed the controls to chart the small voyages: love our enemies, turn the other cheek, walk the extra mile, and love our neighbor. Even then, we need faith’s foundation to trust the right ways to go, when they seem chaotic and filled with fear, not going where we would want to go! As we noticed, the Lord did not give Peter the rudder for his nautical fishing journeys! Peter had no idea where he would wind up!

Maybe the clearest guardrails for our faith, what we cannot and can do on our own, comes from Paul I Corinthians 12:3b, “No one can even say Jesus is Lord without the help of the Holy Spirit.”

How humbling to know we do not need to take credit to decide how to trust the One, we could never fully trust, on our own!

How hard do we find it to totally trust our Lord or anything He asks of us?

How can we do so little, yet receive so much assurance from our Lord?

How grateful are we? Yet, there is more up to us to guide our lives than we ever deserve.

The Lord God is the one who charts more of our life than we ever imagined. Yes, we cannot take credit for it, but what a treasure we have, what a load off our mind, in the faith trials of trust.

How do we trust, that we are on the charted course?

How do we trust, that our Lord would be so kind to journey with us?

How do we trust, that the most exorbitant promises and outrageous commands are the solid ground to hold us up in the Lord, when the waves are crashing against our lives?

On our own, we could never calmly place our lives in His hands, we who are so sinful and unclean. How could we ever trust He could love me?

We have so little control of our ship of life, but it can still accomplish great courageous gifts of the faith: both extremes, yet we can claim so very little credit.

From Acts today, the amazement of the gift of the Spirit blew over them and surrounded them: much like the spirit that moved over the waters in the creation of the world.

Starting from nothing, the spirit put all things together. Here at Pentecost, the spirit moved through the people and created something even more astounding than creation: people of various races, who could not only speak to each other, but understand each other. What a miracle that is! That never happens on our own.

Luther spells out much of this with very clean, almost plain words, as only Luther can from the Small Catechism. We need to understand the Spirit of God is with us, so not only can we do these things, but realize they provide us with the best direction.

God's Spirit is our rudder, we have not created, but graciously given to us, a gift. It is about time to trade in our rudder, for the spirit's guidance. For something new in a sermon: *let us read together Luther's third article of the creed from the bottom of page 1162 that states so simply His rudder is the only one we ever need.*

When we say the simplest words of faith, "I place myself in Your hands," while I walk through any part of life, let alone the valley of the shadows, we humbly recognize there is much we do not understand, and will never need to understand, but they are true!

And, we are totally grateful that life is NOT in our hands, but look at what we can do with the help of the Spirit, with what IS placed in our hands?

Of course, the first thing we have to do in the faith is to search through our "faith closet" and toss out all those Blood Pressure test kits, all those ways we have to test people and the Lord to see if they are trustworthy.

What kind of mental, lie detectors do we use to judge those around us in the faith?

What can satisfy us, on its own?

AND why do we trust those tricky devices of the mind we have false confidence in?

Yes, it is hard to trust, but without trust, no relationship will be anything that can provide the spirit of life. “We cannot even say, ‘Jesus, is Lord’ without the help of the Holy Spirit.” Can we just give the Spirit a chance in our lives? And, if our Lord ever catches us with the Blood Pressure kit, not given by the doctor, we might find it wrapped around our necks, not our arms! Amen