

# “The Promise is Guaranteed”

Ephesians 1:3-14

This past week, we had the Central Illinois District Pastor’s Conference in Springfield. Larry Ehmen and I arrived on Sunday, attended worship, and prepared for a long day of meetings on Monday. All went pretty much as expected. I was a little antsy on Monday as that is my usual sermon writing day, so I read through the readings for today and jotted down some notes.

The theme for our conference was “Christ and Him Crucified” – Paul says that this alone is what he preaches. This alone is what matters. This alone is what saves us – our crucified and risen Savior. There is no other Gospel. There is no other path to life and salvation.

On Tuesday, the convention was scheduled to be over at noon, but because nothing of any importance remained on the agenda, I ducked out a little before 11:00. Taste of Thai is across the road from the Crowne Plaza and I had the strong desire for some Chili on Rice and a couple of egg rolls. I walked in the door about 10:58.

By the way, I was reelected to the District Endowment Committee which meets four times per year in Springfield, and I have lunch at Taste of Thai every time.

As I am finishing my lunch, I have my phone out reading an article about the rescue of the soccer team in Thailand – and not just because I was eating at a Thai restaurant. It is truly miraculous how so many things had to happen for them to survive. Just as I am finishing up, I get a text from Gretchen that Shelly Holtman’s father, Don Durbin, was in the hospital in Springfield. I called Gretchen to get some details, and she told me that Evelyn had called Shelly to see if she could cover for one of the counters who couldn’t be here in the coming weeks. Shelly declined as her dad had suffered a major stroke and she really needed to be with him and could not commit to anything at that time.

I paid my bill, was headed for the car, and I called Shelly. She was obviously very distressed about the condition of her father, as it was clear that he was not going to get better. I told her, “I’m in Springfield. I would like to come see you.” It is about 11:30 at this point.

I arrive at St. John’s Hospital. I had no idea where to park. That place had undergone major reconstruction since I was last there 10 years ago. I followed my GPS instructions – that was a mistake. I followed the signs for parking and ended up circling the place like Joshua and the Israelites going around Jericho. I find a place to park and walk into this beautiful new lobby and right up the information desk.

I said, “I need to find room 808.” This very nice lady had to break the news to me that I was in the wrong building. I had to go up the stairs in the lobby, go to the end of the hall, turn right, go to the end of that hall, turn left,

and go up those elevators. I get to the end of this labyrinth and find elevators which say, "priority use." I determined that my getting to the eighth floor was a priority.

I finally get to the room, and I was right, my need to be there at that moment was a priority. After greeting the family, I ask if I can have a devotion with Don. I began with the invocation, "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." And the confession of sins and the Absolution. We confessed the faith of our Baptism in the Apostle's Creed.

Then in the midst of my prayer which included the words of King David from Psalm 23, Don pretty much quit breathing. As I was sensing that things were changing, I got distracted and skipped over one verses of the Psalm. But as I stated David's confident conclusion of the Psalm saying, "I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever," that was becoming a reality for Don. By the time we finished the Lord's Prayer, even the involuntary breaths were done. Don died at 12:08. I was supposed to be at the conference until noon.

That is by no means the first time such an event has happened in my pastoral ministry, but when I looked back on all the events which had to play out exactly as they did to give me the opportunity to be there at that particular moment in time, I could not help but see the hand of God at work.

The timing of these events was amazing to the point that I would consider them to be awesome. And if you know the depth of which I treasure that word, you know the depth of what I am speaking of today.

Don, who was not a member of Our Redeemer, was not even Lutheran, prior to Tuesday, to my knowledge, I had never met him. But he was certainly a faithful man of God who was, as St. Paul says in our Epistle reading, He was “sealed with the promise of the Holy Spirit who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it.”

God allowed a multitude of events to take place so that I could proclaim our crucified and risen Lord to Don and pronounce the full and complete forgiveness of all of his sins as the Lord called him out of this life.

Not everyone gets that opportunity to have the Word of God and the words of the Absolution spoken at the moment of your death. But have confidence in the faith created in you in Baptism, you are sealed with the promise – the Holy Spirit Himself is with you. He is in you. Your inheritance is guaranteed and one day you will take possession of it, just as Don did last Tuesday.

Have the confidence that because of your Baptism and that faith nurtured in the Word of God, the Holy Spirit is constantly with you, and you live under the grace of God as if you are constantly confessing your sins and your pastor is constantly absolving them.

As Paul said, “In Him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in Him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of His glory.” Amen.