

*Grace Lutheran Church, Uniondale, New York
Lutheran Church of the Epiphany~ Iglesia Luterana de la Epifanía, Hempstead New York
Marianne K. Tomecek, Interim Pastor*

*Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost ~ Proper 15B– August 15, 2021
Proverbs 9:1-6, Psalm 34:9-14, Ephesians 5:15-20, John 6:51-58*

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. AMEN!

In 1995 - 96, Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich led the “shut down” of the government to achieve his “Contract with America.” During that year, although I was officially an Assistant United States Attorney serving in Houston, Texas, I also was on a one-year special assignment to the US Department of Justice, coordinating visits that Attorney General Janet Reno made to many of the federal districts around the country. In fact, the government was “shut down” twice at the time. At the end of the second period, I was looking forward to finally getting back to work on Monday, January 9th after we hadn’t been able to work for two or three weeks. But on the Saturday night before that day, there was a terrific snowstorm that paralyzed the city of Washington, DC.

By January 1996, I had begun the process of applying to seminary and entering the process for approval for ordination, but I still had about five more months until my year appointment was over.

While in Washington, I had been worshiping with a congregation that met in the Northeast section of the capital city. But there was no way that I was going to be able to get to worship there on the day of what was called the “snowstorm of the century.” So I located a Lutheran church that was closer – one I could walk to from my apartment. I called the church to find out the time of service, bundled up and trudged the six blocks through knee-high snow. At the block where First Trinity Lutheran Church stood, I found a narrow path shoveled from the curb and up a staircase to a side door. I cautiously opened the door and was welcomed by a man in a clerical collar. I learned that he was Pastor Sherman Hicks (and he recently had been an ELCA Bishop whose term was completed). He had just begun serving the congregation three weeks earlier.

I explained what I was doing there – that I came to worship because I could walk there from my apartment. Pastor Hicks welcomed me to take off my outer garments. We settled around a conference table in what was a meeting room. It

was warmer than the Nave, Pastor Hicks explained. And by the time worship was scheduled to begin, two other people had arrived: a member of First Trinity and his brother, who was visiting him from out-of-state.

We sat around the table and worshiped the Holy Communion liturgy, including hymns sung *a capella*. Pastor Hicks preached extemporaneously, weaving the effect of the snowstorm into the lessons for the day. And then we shared communion. It was the most intimate experience of the sacrament that I'd ever had – and that's still true today. Pastor Hicks used a small roll, and a deep, rich red wine as the elements of the Lord's Supper. When we received them, it was clear to me that Christ was present among us. We shared the bread of life, and it strengthened us to return to the snow and the various ministries to which we were called. I can still clearly recall that morning, as if it had been last week.

Although it wasn't one of the hymns we sang that day, we could have joined the late Aretha Franklin in one of her earliest gospel songs:

Yes, I hear a voice pleading with me,
Quietly, quietly commune with me.
Just steal away in secret and pray
Quietly, quietly, come break bread with me.¹

During that year, I hoped that I was living my life with the benefit of wisdom – whether the Woman Wisdom figure of Proverbs, or the wisdom of Paul, centuries later, as he explained Christian living to the Ephesians. I had carefully discerned where I could worship that day, and I felt that God affirmed that choice, and blessed all of us gathered to live in such a way that we would be enacting the will of Christ. In fact, I understood that we were living our God-given, Spirit-empowered reality of Christ as it relates to all aspects of our lives individually and corporately,. And we would be involved in all of life's circumstances so that the reality of our new selves was continually manifested in and through the light of our new conduct “at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Eph 5:20.)

John's Gospel is sometimes called the Gospel of Life because the word “life” occurs in it 36 times, as opposed to the 16 times the word appears in the three other canonical Gospels combined. For John, eternal life is not something that God gives to us in the “next” life. It is something we experience in this life, though it is not determined by the natural life. Johannine scholar Fr. Raymond Brown distinguishes the “natural life” which God gives when God breathes the Spirit into

the human being and the Spirit that Jesus breathed onto the disciples in the locked upper room. Eternal life comes through the incarnation, the real life of Jesus. So people who trust in Jesus have already passed from death, or separation from God through sin, into life with God now. (Brown, *Gospel According to John*, 503-8.)

Although it may make us uncomfortable to hear that we are to eat Jesus' flesh and drink his blood, if we do so, we can expect to have life ongoing (v. 53); to be raised on the last day (v. 54); to abide in Jesus (v. 56); to have Jesus abide in us (v. 56); to live because of and for the sake of Jesus (v. 57); and to live forever (v. 58). When we do so, we are in relationship with Jesus, now and eternally,

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of tee Holy Spirit.

1 "You Grow Closer" Songs of Faith – the Gospel of Aretha Franklin [Phillip-Martin-12th-Sunday-after-Pentecost-8-15-2021.pdf](#) ([asermonforeverysunday.com](#))