

Fourteenth Sunday After Pentecost
Joshua 24:1-2a, 14-18
Psalm 34:9-14
Ephesians 6:10-20
John 6:56-69

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Holy Spirit Lutheran Church

Grace and Peace to you all from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ – Amen.

It hard to believe, but just last Sunday our youth were finishing their final day at the Canadian Lutheran Anglican Youth Gathering in Thunder Bay, Ontario.

And after experiencing...

- One night sleeping on a church floor.
- Over 50 hours on a bus.
- 5 nights sleeping in hotels.
- Worship by a water fall.
- A trip to the Human Rights museum and the Royal Canadian Mint.
- A cannon ball contests.
- Many God moments.
- Numerous sing-a-longs
- 4 Large group gatherings.
- 3 Interactive Education sessions.
- Dancing with youth in worship.
- Amazing times of learning from our story weaver and story tellers.
- And too many late nights to mention...

I can tell you one thing is for sure – *WOW* – the Church is in good hands people!

While I may not have been as young as the last time I attended a youth gathering – it would have been near impossible to not come away filled with energy and hope for not only our church but for the world - after interacting with well over 800 youth and leaders who attended CLAY.

We are seriously blessed to have so many wonderful young people as members of our congregation.

And now that they have returned from this great experience of faith formation - we as a congregation just need to learn how best to honor and support all the amazing gifts our youth have been given - and I know awesome spirit filled things will continue to flow from this congregation for decades to come.

Speaking of these gifts...

Did you know our youth share gifts of leadership, ukulele playing, humor, learning, movement, and fun?

What about gifts like: Vlogging, photography, storytelling, video editing, and asking deep and important questions?

Well they share all of these gifts and so many more!

So on their behalf I feel the need to say another huge word of thanks to this wonderful congregation for supporting our youth in going to CLAY - Give yourselves a pat on the back!

It is truly a gift for them, as well as for our national churches, to gather and explore our faith in this way.

I promised our youth I wouldn't steal their thunder for the upcoming CLAY service they will be planning to share their experiences with you in October – but I wished to share a small piece of our learning and growing together with you this morning.

At the gathering – beyond having a really, really, great time - we explored the theme “threads” – which helped us to learn how to tell our stories, experience and hold others stories, and share God's story with the world.

Some of the stories we heard at the gathering were easier to hold.

Like the stories from our wonderful drama team - the CLAYVengers, our four great story tellers, and even the story we heard from our Bishop at the Marina Park about his childhood experience with his grandmothers “special chocolate”, forgiveness, and love – if you haven't heard this one ... you will have to ask Bishop Larry to share it with you someday - just bring your Kleenex.

All these stories made us smile and even laugh at times, while other stories we heard and experienced were harder for us to take in.

On the first full day of the gathering all 800 Clay participants joined in the second largest Kairos Blanket exercise ever hosted in Canada.

Who here has participated in one of these before?

For those of you who haven't had the gift of experiencing this exercise - it's a facilitated and interactive lesson in Canadian history, colonization, and reconciliation that fosters respect and shared learning among indigenous and non-indigenous peoples.

For roughly over an hour you could have heard a pin drop in the large hanger we used to facilitate this exercise, as youth and leaders alike held a holy silence as we learned, and were moved by the stories that were being shared.

Stories from hundreds of years ago – of treaties, disease, mistreatment, and abuse.

And stories from today - like the nine fallen feathers CLAY's Elder in Residence, Esther Diabo shared with us. A story of the nine Indigenous youth who have mysteriously died over the last two years in the Thunder Bay area. Their bodies washing up on the shores of Lake Superior without a formal investigation or answers for their grieving families.

Stories that called our youth to stretch and question, learn and discern, how we might be called to listen and respond to these hard stories as people of God.

Much like our gospel lesson today - we echoed the words of the disciples - because these were difficult teachings for our heads and our hearts to process together – even with the help of Indigenous elders and leaders within our faith community.

That having been said, I can't even begin to tell you how proud I was of our youth for being vulnerable in the heart of their own experience and questions – and in the midst of it all – they also held space for their peers to ask hard questions too.

Questions like:

“Where is God in these stories?”

“How are we supposed to respond to all this?”

And perhaps hardest thing we discovered together that day - was that sometimes answers to these hard questions simply don't come at all.

Yet – even though it didn't seem like it at the time - this is good news for us all.

Because as people of faith we aren't called to have the answers.

As people of faith sometimes we are simply called to hold space for our questions, doubts, and stories to linger in a holy tension with us and with God.

Because our story is God's story - and God's story is our story.

The threads of our lives, our stories, our questions, and our pains are always being held and woven into the great tapestry of God's Creation.

Sometimes the threads are frayed, and sometimes they are new.

Some of them fall neatly into line, while others mix and mingle their way through.

And maybe that is the point of our journey of faith after all.

Not that we come to have all the answers ... or that the threads of our lives are always perfectly in line.

But that through our journey of faith we continue to learn how to hold our stories, our questions, our doubts, and other stories we come to encounter in this world – weaving our own threads together – until the great day when we will all be bound up in the tapestry of God’s great Love.

Because when we hold on to that promise, in faith and hope – we are placing our trust in more than just what we can achieve.

We are placing our trust in the great faithfulness of God – who comes to us where ever we are at – inviting us to come, bringing our threads to the table to be woven together again – promising us that the holy one will never let go of us or our stories.

And that is good news for us all.

And I couldn’t be more proud of our youth for embracing this good news for themselves.

For continuing to come with their questions, their doubts, and their wonderings – trusting that God and this community of faith will continue to carry the threads of their stories just as they are.

So know and trust that you are welcome here too just as you are.

That the stories, questions, and threads of your lives have a place to be woven within the grand tapestry of God.

And may we hold space for those stories to be woven among us.

– Amen.