

Now What? Updates from Pastor Jason



By Pastor Jason Burggraff

“It’s like cows standing out in the pasture, staring at a newly opened gate...”

I clearly remember one of my beloved seminary professors, Jim Nestingen, joyfully quoting his beloved colleague, retired Professor of Systematic Theology, Gerhard Forde, who used this picture to describe what happens when you hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ for the first time (and the Gospel always comes as new news, so this hopefully happens often). When you hear and trust that despite all of your bluster, sin, and pride, all has been done for you, and that you don’t need to do anything...when you hear now that Christ has died for your sins and was raised so that you too will be raised...well what do you want to do now? All of a sudden, the whole of God’s creation is opened up to you. And you know what? It has!

Cows in the pasture with a newly opened gate pretty well describes these weeks after Easter. He is risen, Alleluia! This is truly good news, but now what? Those disciples of Jesus weren’t quite sure what to make of the resurrection. They heard it preached to them and didn’t believe it. (moo!) But then Jesus appeared to them in bodily form. Mark says he “upbraided them for their lack of faith and stubbornness” (a refreshingly human and brotherly response to those guys!). But then he charged them to “Go into all the world and proclaim the good news

to the whole creation. The one who believes and is baptized will be saved; but the one who does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:14-17). Luke’s Gospel tells us that Jesus appeared, startling the disciples, reassured them, asked for something to eat, and then began to preach that he (the Son of Man) was the fulfillment of all the promises of scripture. He then said they would proclaim repentance and the forgiveness of sins to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem. What a wide-open gate those disciples had! Yet they had to wait until Pentecost and the Holy Spirit’s power to carry their preaching—cows staring at an open gate.

We too often sit in the wonder of it all that Christ has been raised from the grave, really—and that your sins are all taken away—really, and that because of this you too will be raised from the grave—really. This is all beautifully freeing news, but now what? What is that open gate in front of us? Well, the work and freedom of the Church continues from Jesus’ charge to the disciples through today—to proclaim Christ’s death and resurrection for the forgiveness of sins. This does truly take work, time, support, and sometimes trial, error, and trying again—as the people of First Lutheran know. But it is accomplished out of the freedom that Christ has already given to us—that there is nothing left now to be earned, for Jesus has accomplished all—he has been raised!

We started this year with a budgetary decision to pause our call process for a third pastor who will work with Evangelism and Outreach. From this pause, we have taken time to begin developing

an awareness campaign for FLC. While these conversations have begun with Mason VanEssen (Congregation Secretary), Michael Kedik (Congregation Past-President), Deb Nelson (Past Chair of Welcome and Community Board), Jodi Hoyt (Communications and Technology Director), and myself—we hope that the awareness, processes for increased member engagement (new and existing), increased pledging so that we can comfortably plan for a third pastor, and excitement for the Gospel being proclaimed through this congregation will continue through our Council, Boards, and all members. FLC has an incredible witness to share, and the Holy Spirit will carry this proclamation out to those who need to hear it. I give thanks for your partnership in the Gospel of Jesus. Most of all, I give thanks for the open gate that Christ has opened for us all and which allows us to freely ask the question: what do you want to do now, now that you don't need to do anything?