

The Seventh Sunday of Easter
May 12, 2013 (9:00 AM)
The Rev. Robert H. Malm

Changing Lives

Alleluia! Christ is risen! The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Today is the seventh and last Sunday in the Easter Season, a “week” of Sundays before Pentecost. During this season of Easter we celebrate God changing lives. We have seen those “changed lives” here at Grace Church with all the baptisms we have celebrated; perhaps not a record, but we have had eight baptisms this Easter, with another at 11:15 AM today.

It all starts with Jesus. We baptize, we share the Eucharist, we are the Church, the Body of Christ, because Jesus rose from the dead and sent his apostles to all the world, giving them the “Great Commission” (Matthew 28:16-20) to make disciples, baptize and teach. God raised Jesus from death and gave him 40 days to help his disciples realize this mission. “*As you, Father, are in me... may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me...*” We abide in God the Father through God the Son by God the Holy Spirit. We are in God as we live in God’s love and share his love with the world.

Love changes lives. Easter shows us God’s love through Jesus’ victory over death. Death, and the threat of death, can seem so final, so lasting. The Risen Jesus shows us that love is stronger than death. We are one with God as we share God’s love.

Mothers give us life and they change lives by their love. This is what we celebrate today on Mothers’ Day, this love our mothers share with us. Each of us might think of one or two or three or even more ways our mothers have changed our lives by their love. We give thanks for this love our mothers have shared with us.

St. Paul knew this love after his conversion. He traveled far to share God’s love through the power of the Risen Lord Jesus. The Book of Acts is the story of changed lives – a changed world. Today we hear of Paul and his companions in Philippi, in northern Greece, sharing love that changes lives.

First we see a slave girl, freed of her evil spirit. A spirit which enabled her to tell the future and made a great deal of money for her owners. The spirit inside this girl knew Paul was himself a “*slave*” of the Risen Jesus. She knew Paul had discovered the true way of salvation. After Paul exorcised the evil spirit from her, she knew freedom, but her owners had Paul and his companions arrested, beaten and put in prison.

Next we hear of a miraculous earthquake, shaking the foundations of the prison, unfastening the chains and opening the doors. The jailer in charge is so enslaved to his sense of duty that he wants to kill himself rather than risk shame and ridicule over allowing prisoners to escape. Paul frees the jailer from his shame and guilt, and the story ends with the jailer caring for Paul and those imprisoned, washing their wounds, and then the jailer with all his family are baptized.

Easter always means freedom; freedom always changes lives. Freedom comes through an awareness of God's love – for the slave girl, for the jailer and his family, for you and me.

I hope each of us have learned love and freedom from our parents, especially our mothers. My mother, soon to be 85, has battled cancer on and off for the last three years. She has taught me love and freedom even as she struggles with her health and endures chemotherapy and other serious medications.

Yet some parents, some mothers, can lose this sense of love, of freedom. This loss can also be passed on to children. In the worst cases it becomes abuse. We pray for healing, for forgiveness in these cases of loss and abuse. Jesus prayed that we would be one – united by God's love; united to the Risen Christ and his victory over death; united to the power of the Spirit sending God's love into all the world; united – one – as God's people in his time and place.

We are not alone. We are one with God and with one another.

Acts 16:16-34
Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17, 20-21
John 17:20-26