

The 100th Anniversary of Trinity Lutheran Church, Villa Park, IL
November 10, 2013
Text: Isaiah 40:8
Theme: "A Story Without End"

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One hundred years ago, almost to the day, a group of Lutherans, meeting at Ardmore School formed Trinity Lutheran Church. On that day, I am certain that no one imagined where Trinity would be in 100 years. From 1913 until today, the world has greatly changed, perhaps more than ever before in such a short amount of time. Throughout these 100 years, this little group of Lutherans has been a mouthpiece for God's word to this community.

In the early days, we grew. You couldn't stop us as the German immigrants flooded in from the city looking for land. They came in droves on the Aurora-Elgin railway and bought lots to get their families out of the crowded city of Chicago. Now in these later days, the immigrants are still coming but more slowly and no longer German Lutherans but rather second and third generation Hispanic immigrants who are not looking for a Lutheran church but a Roman Catholic church and Middle Eastern people, many looking for a Mosque and many who do not know God as he reveals himself in Holy Scripture. Who could have imagined this story?

God imagined this story. Isaiah tells us that the grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of God remains forever. For 100 years, we have preached and taught the Word of God. We have been sounding the trumpet none can silence nor mistake so that all the world can hear that feast is ready. Come to the feast!

We started as a little group of first and second- generation immigrants, swelled to a massive congregation of over 1500, and now, we are back to a medium sized family of 500. We rented, built, burned, built again, moved across the street, built bigger, added on and remodeled, remodeled, remodeled and therein is the secret to our amazing success. In 100 years, God has never stopped remodeling us. The potter makes us into whatever vessel he needs through which his lavish love will flow. While many churches our age are near death, we are alive and vibrant with an overflowing nursery school, a boxing club, a music center, a youth group, a seniors ministry, quilters, 6 weekly adult bible studies four of which are led by lay people, a senior choir and a bell choir. We have never stopped becoming whatever we need to be to proclaim the Word of God to our community. When you lay yourself before the potter and say, do with me whatever pleases you O Lord, art of amazing proportion is created.

I was called here 9 years ago, only the 6th senior pastor in 100 years. I quickly surmised that I was standing on the shoulders of giants. Arno Schlechte, Bill Hughes, Buck Holm, David Ritt and Tom Sanders had led this place for 91 years before me and I will tell you that the mantel of this office felt heavy. How would I, a 41-year-old pastor with no experience as a senior pastor step into those gigantic shoes? But I quickly came to understand that while all those pastors before me brought gifts to this place it was not they who had created this amazing success. It was the love – the Kingly love, the Lavish love, the Seeking love the Holy love, the Ruthless love of God that does brook man’s cool and careless enmity and

raises the trumpet again and again to our lips as we blow for all the world to hear! Trinity and her pastors are the trumpet through which the breath of God flows.

Zacchaeus wanted to see who Jesus was. In our information-saturated society, we may think that there are no Zacchaeus' left, but I beg to differ. People have so much information but they cannot differentiate the important from the trivial. We are consumed by puny cares! We look at Facebook and know what everyone had for dinner at the restaurant last night. PUNY CARE! We receive three automated phone calls from the school district, one from the church and one from the dentist. PUNY CARE! We have 72 emails many of which are cleverly disguised junk. PUNY CARE! Yes. We know everything about everybody but on what do we focus? Where do we look? It's not like there is only one thing going on in town and a sycamore tree to climb from which we can see everything.

The people of today are far more lost than Zacchaeus was. But the seeking love of God will not rest. No matter how much alien sound tries to drown out the ancient, true and constant melody, the trumpet of God will sound and it has sounded through us for 100 years and will continue to sound as long as the last one of us has breath in his lungs.

Jesus saw Zacchaeus sitting in the sycamore tree and he looked right at that sinful tax collector. Jesus, filled with kingly love, lavish love, holy love, said, "Today salvation has come to your house!" Of course, Zacchaeus had a choice. He could have refused to have dinner with Jesus. He could have refused to follow Jesus' holy path. He could have chosen to

ignore the Master Potter and to serve himself instead. But he didn't. The kingly love of God pulled him down from that tree and he followed Jesus. Who could have guessed that Jesus would call or that Zacchaeus would follow? Jesus has called Trinity into some strange places too – times when we didn't see where he was taking us but we have followed nevertheless – sometimes dragging our feet and sometimes joyfully and always, in the end, rejoicing at what he has done this time. That is why our story has not ended, because when one is living His story, "the grass withers, the flower fades," but there is no end.

Today, Christ keeps setting the table for the feast and blowing the trumpet. He keeps calling all the Zacchaeus' in our community to come to the feast. German Zacchaeus', Polish Zacchaeus', Hispanic Zacchaeus', Middle Eastern Zacchaeus'.... The Feast is ready! Come to the feast. The good and the bad. Come and be glad. Greatest and least, come to the feast!