

April 29, 2018

5th Sunday of Easter

John 15:1-8 (Year B)

Lutheran Church of Our Father, Greensboro, NC

(On this particular Sunday, I opted to tell a story as our sermon. The story is "The Song of the King" by Max Lucado, though the version I told contains many alterations that I made. Below is a copy of the story as I told it.)

Long ago and far away, there lived a king who had two children, a daughter and a son. The daughter was the older of the two, and when it came time for her to be married, she and her father spent days in conversation. It was the custom of that Kingdom that when a prince or princess was to be married, three suitors would be chosen – and put to the test – to see which of them was worthy to join the royal family. So the conversation between father and daughter was this – what should the challenge be?

At last they agreed, and the princess chose three knights – all with kind hearts and brave and willing spirits. The king sent them the invitation to try for the princess hand, and all three accepted with great joy. The prince was sent to give them their instructions.

They met at a roadside inn – and the four sat around a table before a roaring fire as the prince gave them these instructions: Your challenge is a journey. Within the week you must leave from this inn and travel to my father's castle through the forest Hemlock.

The forest Hemlock! Fear stuck every heart. The knights were brave – but the forest Hemlock was a dangerous place. It was the home of the Hopenots – small, sly creatures with yellow eyes. Hopenots were clever and surprisingly strong - and they were many. Some believed they were travelers who had lost their way, and been changed by the forest – but no one really knew for sure.

Must we travel alone? Asked the first knight. His name was Carl. He was the biggest and strongest of the knights, but he knew that to enter the forest Hemlock alone would be madness. You may each choose one companion to travel with you, said the prince. Choose wisely. Choose well.

But the forest is dark and there are no paths – how will we find our way? It was the second knight that spoke. His name was Alan. He was not as strong as Sir Carl, but he was fast. He won every race – on horse or on foot. Yet Alan knew that speed made no difference without direction, and so he asked, How will we find our way?

The prince smiled, and took from a pouch at his side an ivory flute. There are only two flutes like this in all the world. I have one and my father has the other. Then the prince put the flute to his lips, and began to play...

The song stirred something in each man's soul – and despite themselves they looked at one another around the table and smiled. Three times each day – morning, noon and night – my father will stand on the walls of the castle and play this song. Follow his music. It will guide you through the forest.

The prince turned to the third knight. His name was John. He was not as strong as Carl, or as fast as Alan, but he paid attention – he noticed things that others missed. Do you have a question, Sr. John? Asked the prince.

John was quiet for a moment and then he said, There are only two flutes – and you and your father play the same music.

Yes said the prince. Then I have no questions, said Sir John. Very well, said the prince. Gather your supplies. Choose your companion. I wish you safe journeys.

Back at the palace, there was great excitement. Everyone knew about the challenge – and each champion had a group of people hoping he would win. The people talked of nothing else, and at every opportunity people would turn their gaze on the forest Hemlock – watching... waiting... Three times each day – morning, noon and night – the king would stand on the walls of the castle, and send his song soaring out over the forest...

And three times a day the people would stop to listen. This went on for days – and then weeks. The people began to grow worried... Would all three champions be lost? Then it happened – early one morning as the last notes of the king's song died away – two figures emerged, stumbling from the woods. A shout went up from the watchers on the wall! Hurry, said the King to his servants – go and get them. Bring them into the palace and care for their needs. Dress the knight as a prince – but tell no one who he is... Tonight there will be a banquet! We'll hear his story then...

So the day was filled with preparation – and that evening every citizen was crowded into the huge banquet hall, where a sumptuous feast was spread. The door to the hall stood open, and when everything was ready – the king put his flute to his lips, and once more began to play...

Every person in the hall craned their necks to see who would answer the king's summons... and through the open doorway walked... Sir John! It's John! Sir John! Shouts went up all around the room as Sir John came forward and bowed before the king. The king raised him up, and held him like a son – and the princess joined in the embrace. Then the king said, Tell us of your journey.

It was hard, said the knight... the trees grow thick together so that it is always dark, and there are no paths to follow. The Hopenots were cruel and crafty. They attacked, and we fought back. They took our horses, and we continued on foot. But they did something far worse – they imitated... Each time you played your song, the Hopenots played as well. There were a thousand flutes playing in every

direction. I don't know what happened to the other knights, but I do know that strength or speed will not help one hear the right flute.

The princess asked the question that was on every heart – So, how did you find your way? John smiled – and beckoned toward the open door – I choose the right companion.

The people turned again to look as John's companion entered. The prince! It's the prince! And in his hand he carried an ivory flute.

I knew that no one else could play your song exactly as you do – and I trusted him to stay with me all the way. So I asked him to be my companion. While we traveled, he played... I learned your song so well that though a thousand other flutes tried to hide it, I could still hear your song – and I followed it.

Brothers and sisters, dear ones, there is a song that guides our lives. It is the song of our King. The song of our God. The song of our Christ. And this is our call: that we abide in him, as he abides in us. That we tie ourselves to him and live our lives in him. That we choose him as our companion, and follow where he leads. That we journey with him. That we abide in his notes, and place our life in his song. Thanks be to God. Amen.