



# SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

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THE REV. CANON EMILY GRIFFIN, CANON VICAR  
FEAST OF ELISABETH CRUCIGER, MAY 3, 2025 CATHEDRAL DAY  
JOEL 2:23-29; PSALM 26; 2 COLOSSIANS 3:11-17; MARK 4:26-29

## THE 500 YEAR VIEW

*Mark 4:26-29* [Jesus said, “The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come.”]

Be careful what you pray for. In a few moments, Bishop Phil will pray that we will be sent forth in the power of the Holy Spirit to perform the service set before us. Fair warning: “the service set before us” can change. It’s a bit like “other duties as assigned.” While the promises we renew today stay the same, the shape they take will change as we change and the world changes around us. There’s a reason we use the word power when it comes to the Holy Spirit; it’s not always

gentle like a whisper or soft like a candle flame. Gentle and soft are not always what’s called for. Sometimes the Spirit is more like a gale force wind or a four-alarm fire in our lives, wreaking havoc on the channels we’ve created for God’s grace. The Spirit of God can radically alter our landscape and call us to something new, shaking everything that can be shaken so that only what’s unshakable remains.

Take Elisabeth Cruciger, for example, the hymn writer we remember today.

A little over 500 years ago, as the Protestant Reformation was lighting up Europe, Elisabeth's parents placed her in a convent in what is now Poland. At age 15 (the same age some of you are now), she took her vows as a nun. She thought she knew what it meant for her life to make a mature public affirmation of faith and follow Jesus. But then, the Spirit blew through...this time, in the form of smuggled books by Martin Luther and others...and opened doors she never imagined she could walk through. She left the convent at age 22 and made the 250-mile journey to Wittenberg, Germany – the flashpoint of the Reformation - to see the service God would set before her next.

It felt like the days the prophet Joel had foretold in today's first reading. God's Spirit was pouring out all over the place right in front of her. Scriptures, liturgies, and hymns were suddenly being written and translated into languages everyone could understand. Music in church would not be held by clergy and choirs alone anymore. Luther and others wanted

everyone to be able to lift their voices and sing. So then, if Joel was right, if sons and daughters can prophesy, if young and old can dream dreams and see visions, then why shouldn't Elisabeth pay attention to her own dreams? You see, one night she dreamed that she was standing in the pulpit of her own church preaching. So what if women had been locked out of that role for the last 1500 years? If the Spirit of God is creating a new channel of grace, who are we to say No?

Whatever her husband's motivation was in directing her toward hymn writing instead, his counsel proved wise. 500 years later, here today, we'll sing her best-known hymn, "The only Son from heaven" as folks are being confirmed and received and are reaffirming their baptismal vows. Her words will be on our lips. Now that's power. Most of us can't remember much of the last sermon we heard. But the hymns of the church - they stay with us. Amazing grace, O God our help in ages past, Love divine all loves excelling, Be thou my vision... They

come to our aid and form our prayers when our own words fail. When I'm too tired or scared or, these days, too angry to pray my own words, hymns still come through for me. They say what we can't; they name the faith and hope and love we don't always feel, and they can carry us through. When my Grandma was suffering from dementia, when she didn't know where she was or why she was there, she still knew hymns. They poured out of her and revealed her heart, the beloved child of God she always was and always will be. They can do the same for us, if we let them.

So, what does all this have to do with us now, in a culture where the words of the church feel like a foreign language that fewer and fewer of us understand? How can renewing our baptismal vows today make a difference in a world that already feels like it's on fire – and not in a good way? Well, these promises, these rituals, these songs - they reveal the unshakable truth of who we are – the beloved children of God we always have been and always will be, no

matter our age or class or gender. They ground us in something more solid and time-tested than our good intentions or our momentary rage. They can help to unify us as we speak and sing in harmony as the body of Christ in the world and do together the work of justice and peace that's too big and too important to do alone. And yes, they can alert us to the new channels of grace that God is still carving out among us; they can give us the courage to keep creating amidst all the destruction – to keep reading and writing and singing and making music and showing up and speaking out for each other. Who knows where our dreams will take us or what doors they'll open, whose work in this room will still be known 500 years from now? In the Name of the One who gives us power and expects us to use it, Amen.



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