
WORSHIP COMPANION

A collection of voices and resources to guide homebound worship amidst the global pandemic.

August - November 2020

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Prior to Pentecost this year I was talking to a friend about the church's ability to continue its work amidst the challenging times at hand. The very real threat of COVID19 had most, if not all, the churches in Ohio relegated to online arenas on Sunday mornings, and seeking to extend their virtual footprint to offer words of hope, gospel, and guidance to all who are seeking.

I suggested that Pentecost this year would mirror the familiar account in Acts when the church spoke in tongues to communicate the gospel. We may not be speaking the languages that the Apostles did, but now the church would be learning how to communicate through Zoom, Facebook, YouTube, and other platforms. My friend said he thought Pentecost would mirror the New Testament story in a different way. He suggested it would be a beautiful example of the church learning how to work together in new ways, and creating a new sense of self, which has not been done on this scale since Luke's account in Acts.

In truth, Pentecost this year was both of these things, a time of speaking in new ways, and working together in unprecedented ways to establish a new sense of church. For those where I serve, we began a series of touchless food drives, encouraging parishioners to drive by the church and drop off canned goods for the local food pantry. We also worked closely with a brewery and a food truck in our neighborhood to offer a free community meal program from our parking lot. The positive engagement of parishioners & community partners began to show us that worship could happen from our homes, as new ministries were blooming outside the building.

However, there are many who cannot join current online expressions of the church because of insufficient internet, lack of computer ownership, or other technological issues. This forces us to ask the question, how does the church continue to speak, and reach out, to those on the other side of the internet divide?

What you have before you is an offering to the church during this time of shifting, growing, and recalibrating. The goal is simple; to provide words of hope, gospel, and guidance to any who may be seeking them in a printable form.

Within these pages is a complete order of worship for each Sunday from August 2nd (the 9th Sunday After Pentecost) through November 22nd (Christ The King). There is a Call To Worship, Prayer of the Day, Reading(s), Sermon, Prayers of Intercession, the Lord's Prayer, Thanksgiving for the Word, and Closing prayer for every Sunday.

These prayers, sermons, and other parts of worship have been contributed by a wonderful and diverse group of people I have the pleasure to call peers, colleagues, and most of all friends. By contributing their time and efforts, we have created this Worship Companion that is not limited or restricted by copyright or publication laws. Our hope is that this resource be shared with all seeking connection, hope, and the gospel during these isolating and challenging times.

Rev. Daniel W. Hille
Eighth Week After Pentecost, 2020

SERMONS

August 2, 2020

Rev. Eric Wooldridge, Pastor, Trinity Lutheran Church, Enumclaw, WA

August 9, 2020

Rev. Jason Chesnut, Itinerant Preacher and Teacher, Delaware-Maryland Synod, Baltimore, MD

August 16, 2020

Rev. Bob Abrams, Assistant to the Bishop, Southern Ohio Synod

August 23, 2020

Rev. Matthew Kamprath, Pastor, First Lutheran Church, Geneseo, IL

August 30, 2020

Rev. Paul Jones Moody, Pastor, Messiah Lutheran Church, Cleveland, OH

September 6, 2020

Rev. M. Jill King, Pastor, Our Savior Lutheran Church, Durham, NC

September 13, 2020

Rev. Justin Thornburg, Pastor, Emerson Avenue Baptist Church, Indianapolis, IN

September 20, 2020

Rev. Daniel W. Hille, Pastor, Faith Lutheran Church, Whitehall, OH

September 27, 2020

Rev. Jocelyn Johnston, Interim Pastor, St. John Lutheran Church, North Versailles, PA

October 4, 2020

Rev. Paul Offhaus, Pastor, St. John Evangelical Church, Fort Wayne, IN

October 11, 2020

Rev. Kjersten Sullivan, Pastor, Trinity Lutheran Church, Battle Creek, MI

October 18, 2020

Rev. Carolyn Albert Donovan, Pastor, Peace Lutheran Church, Auston, TX

October 25, 2020

Rev. Darryl Thompson Powell, Associate Director for African Descent Ministries, ELCA and Pastor, Resurrection Lutheran, Elk Grove Village, IL

November 1, 2020

Rev. Dominic V. Guido, Senior Pastor, Gloria Dei Lutheran Church, Crestview Hills, KY

November 8, 2020

Rev. Jeff Schlesinger, Pastor, Heart of Illinois Lutheran Parish (First Lutheran, Lee IL and Immanuel Lutheran, Compton, IL)

November 15, 2020

Rev. Louise C. Hilbert, Interim Pastor, North Carolina Synod, Durham, NC

November 22, 2020

Rev. A. Wallace Anderson, (Retired), St. Martin Lutheran Church, Malvern, OH

LITURGICAL RESOURCES

Prayers of Intercession - August & September, Opening & Ending

Rev. Travis Meier, Pastor, Peace Lutheran Church, College Station, TX

Prayers of Intercession - October

Rev. Will Rose, Pastor, Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Chapel Hill, NC

Call to Worship, Prayers of the Day, Prayers of Intercession - November

Rev. Daniel W. Hille, Pastor, Faith Lutheran Church, Whitehall, OH

Thanksgiving for the Word

Rev. R Adam Berndt, Pastor, Cross of Hope Lutheran Church, Albuquerque, NM

Closing Prayer

Bishop Yehiel Curry, Metropolitan Chicago Synod, ELCA

GRAPHICS AND LAYOUT

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(With the exception of Luther's Rose used on page 92)

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NINTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
August 2, 2020



NINTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Sunday, August 2, 2020

Call To Worship

I will exalt you, my God the King;

I will praise your name for ever and ever.

They speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty

I will praise your name for ever and ever.

The LORD is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made.

I will praise your name for ever and ever.

(adapted from Psalm 145)

Prayer of the Day

God of grace and abundance, you provide for us in so many ways, offering sustenance both physical and spiritual. Feed us by your Holy Spirit, and grant us assurance in your healing, forgiveness, and strength, through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Amen.

Gospel - Matthew 14:13-21

¹³ When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. ¹⁴ When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick. ¹⁵ As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a remote place, and it's already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food." ¹⁶ Jesus replied, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat." ¹⁷ "We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish," they answered. ¹⁸ "Bring them here to me," he said. ¹⁹ And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. ²⁰ They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. ²¹ The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.

Sermon - Rev. Eric Wooldridge, Pastor, Trinity Lutheran Church, Enumclaw, WA

It's rare that a story appears in all four of our Gospels. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John each had to pick and choose what to include in their accounts of Jesus' life and ministry. Nearly every event that all four writers include is directly tied to Jesus' death and resurrection. The one big exception is today's Gospel story: The Feeding of the 5,000.

Every Gospel tells us that Jesus withdrew from the great crowds. Every Gospel tells us that those very crowds found him and craved more of what he offered. Every Gospel tells us that he offered them not only teaching, but abundant food from the multiplying of five loaves of bread and two fish.

Why was this particular event so noteworthy and memorable? After all, this is the same Jesus who had said, "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." [Matt. 4:4] The key to this story lies, I believe, in the event that immediately preceded it. Jesus withdrew from the crowds because he had just learned of the death of his cousin and fellow preacher of God's Kingdom, John the Baptist.

"[John's] disciples came and took the body and buried it; then they went and told Jesus," we read in Matthew 14:12.

When the disciple's whose memories would seed our New Testament watched Jesus multiply those loaves and fish, they weren't simply watching another miracle. They were answering the question, "How does our Messiah respond when tragedy hits close to home?" Jesus' response, it turns out, is to offer daily bread.

I once heard a sermon that suggested the Feeding of the 5,000 is about sharing. Jesus set the example for the crowd, this sermon explained, by sharing from one small meal. Someone else in the crowd had plenty of food, but was afraid of going hungry if he needed to share with others. He took a chance, however, and offered his food to those around him. When those around him with food stored away saw what was happening, they shared their own food, and a chain reaction resulted in full bellies and many baskets of leftovers.

While sharing with one another is important, I'd like to suggest that this type of interpretation robs the story of its depth and meaning. This is not a story about us and our ability to share from our abundance. This is a story about Jesus and his miraculous ability to offer daily bread precisely when we have nothing at all to share. Let us remind ourselves of the question the disciples would have been asking: "How does our Messiah respond when tragedy hits close to home?"

They already knew of ancient stories where God had provided in the most desperate of times. They had heard of their ancestors eating manna in the wilderness, and they might have memorized Isaiah's encouragement to the Israelites in exile: "Everyone who thirsts,

come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." Now they were seeing God in the flesh live out the definition of grace: a free gift. Jesus was giving the people what they needed even when they had nothing to offer; and he was doing it in response to a terrible sin committed against his dear cousin.

I hope and pray that none of us have experienced the beheading of a family member by a tyrannical king, as Jesus did. His desire to withdraw was completely understandable; his willingness to minister amid his grief was astonishing. We do each have tyrants in our lives, however. They often go by names like illness, regret, or addiction. Like King Herod, these tyrants have the power to bring tragedy to our lives.

How does Jesus respond when tragedy hits close to home? He loves... abundantly, miraculously. He provides (for a crowd of 5,000!) enough for a day.

When the tyrants of your life oppress you, Jesus is there to provide enough for a day. He offers healing, forgiveness, and strength. He offers bread too, when that is what we need. It happens to come with his own real presence. Without money, without price, Jesus offers us enough for today. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

As members of the Body of Christ, gathered here and across the world, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need.

God of abundance - you have drawn us to yourself in our need. When we thirst, you have provided water; when we grow hungry, you have provided food; when we long for company, you have knit together a community of people in your image. We thank you for your abundant blessings. Lord, in your mercy.

Hear our Prayer.

God of justice - you know that we stray from your call to care for our neighbors. We hoard our resources. We ignore those in need. We cling with tight fists to the gifts you have given us. Shape us into a generous people. Pour out your Spirit on us so that we may give to others as you have first given us. Lord, in your mercy.

Hear our Prayer.

God of healing, pour out your presence into the bodies and spirits of those who are lonely, those who are sick, those in need of any kind (especially). Protect those who care for the sick and grant them strength for their work. Lord, in your mercy.

Hear our Prayer.

Gracious Spirit, intercede for us with sighs too deep for words; keep us in true faith; and gather us with the whole church on earth, into the communion of the triune God.

Amen.

Thanksgiving for the Word

We bless you, faithful God, for your holy Word that sustains us in hope. Your Word creates anew each day and brings forth blessing. For your Word of grace, O God, **we give you thanks and praise!**

Your Word has fed your people throughout the journey in times of joy and challenge; struggle and celebration. Continue to feed us with your Word of life, O God, **that we may abound in faith!**

Jesus embodied your Word of love and gave himself as your everlasting promise. Teach us his ways of love and service to our neighbor. Through your Word of Jesus, **equip us to share your love and life with the world!**

In thanks and praise for your living Word to heal the world, Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray:

Lord's Prayer

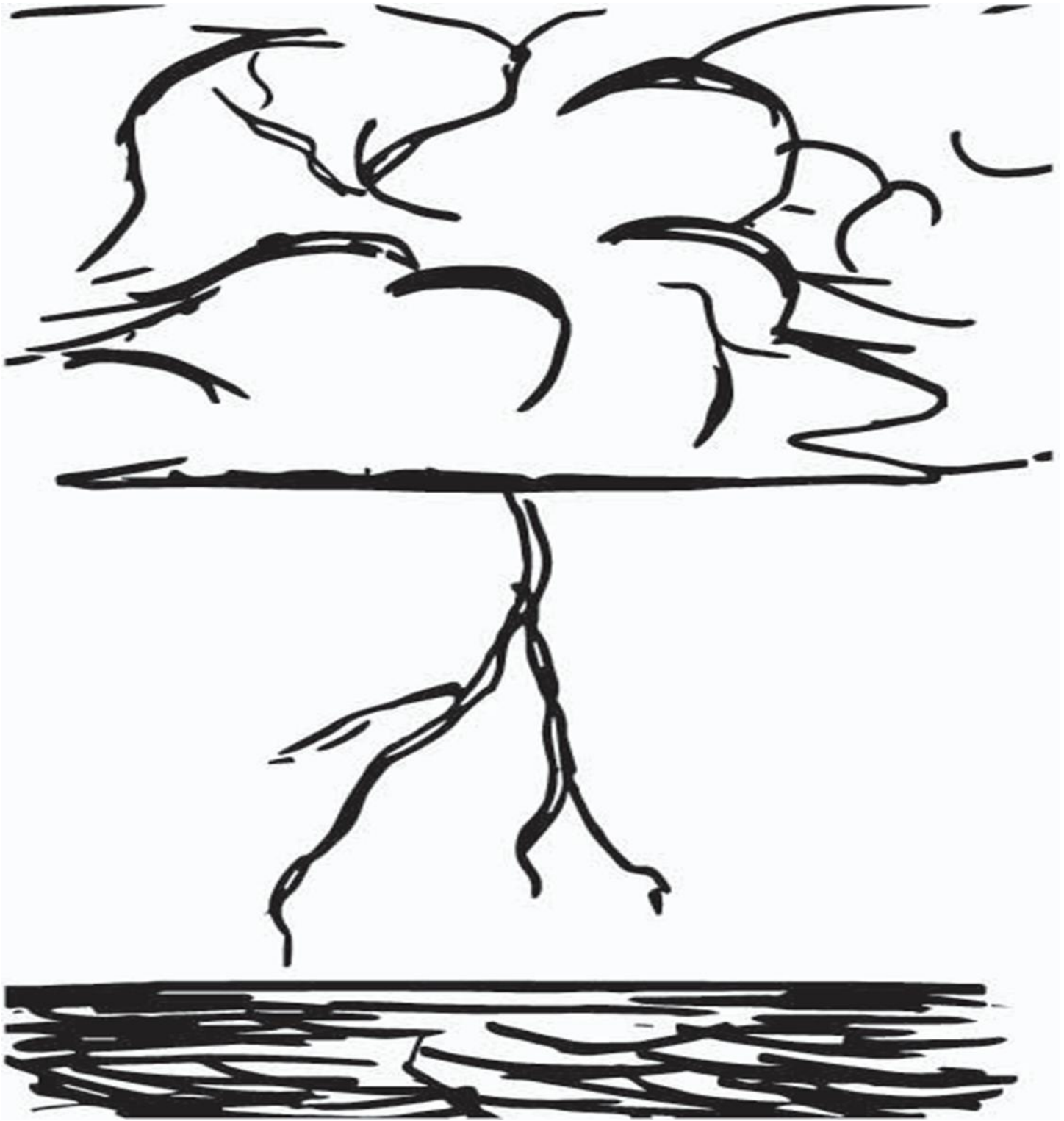
Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
forever and ever.
Amen.

Closing Prayer

As we move from this time of worship, we rejoice O Lord that your peace abides with us. May it give us the patience and resilience to faithfully serve you with acts of love for our brothers and sisters even from our homes.
Amen.

TENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

August 9, 2020



TENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

August 9, 2020

Call To Worship

I will listen to what God the Lord says;

he promises peace to his people, his faithful servants

Surely his salvation is near those who fear him,

he promises peace to his people, his faithful servants

The Lord will indeed give what is good, and our land will yield its harvest.

he promises peace to his people, his faithful servants

(adapted from Psalm 85)

Prayer of the Day

God of all time and space, you've passed then stories of your faithfulness to us by the mouths of the faithful, and through the pages of sacred scripture. Bless us like you servant Isaiah, that we might take these holy texts into ourselves, always remembering your call, faithfulness, and saving of our lives by the life, death, and resurrection of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Amen.

Gospel - Matthew 14:22-33

²² Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. ²³ After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone, ²⁴ and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it. ²⁵ Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. ²⁶ When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear. ²⁷ But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

²⁸ "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water."

²⁹ "Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. ³⁰ But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" ³¹ Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?" ³² And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. ³³ Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

Sermon - Rev. Jason Chesnut, Itinerant Preacher and Teacher, Delaware-Maryland Synod, Baltimore, MD

One of the first stories I learned to tell by heart was this one, Jesus walking on the water from Matthew's Gospel. I started learning it after I had recently learned something else, almost a decade ago: I was diagnosed with a mental illness, unipolar depression with bursts of intense anxiety.

Now when you learn a Bible story, you end up spending a *lot* of time with the words — not just in your head, but in your hands, your feet, sometimes your entire body. You internalize the story; you let it in, and it starts doing its thing.

This process of Biblical marination eventually led to feeling as though *Jesus himself* was catching me by the hand as I drowned in depression; his questioning look more guided by grace in my telling, his firm grasp letting me know I wasn't alone. I wasn't just telling this story; it was now becoming part of *my story*. This story wasn't just told once a long time ago, it was being retold here and now.

Turns out this ancient story wasn't ancient at all. It had something very relevant to say, to me, in my life.

—

In *Signs*, the vastly underrated 2002 film by M. Night Shyamalan set in rural Pennsylvania during an unknown alien attack, there comes this moment in the story when things look their bleakest. The aliens have landed, and, even though we can't see them, we know they're getting closer. The main character, a widower with two children, sees the writing on the wall. Sheltering in place in their home, he enlists the help of his brother and they start hammering nails into wood, strengthening the doors to the unknown outside, buckling down.

It soon goes from bad to worse. You can still hear the aliens trying to get in, the clawing and scratching melt together with the pounding of the hammer; it's a swirl of horror. It's at just this moment that the father kneels down, stops hammering, and tells his daughter a story: the story of when she was born. It's jarring to watch; with the mother dead and the rest of the family in mortal peril, this particular story seems utterly removed from the reality of what's going on around them.

One can imagine an older child hearing this same story being told and saying, "*What does this have to do with anything, Dad??!?*" And yet — The two kids in *Signs* are perhaps still young enough to encounter their birth narratives with wonder. Both the daughter and the son hear these stories told (presumably again), and you can see the peace that descends on them.

Maybe it was the moment *itself* that called forth the stories, as many of our biblical tales arise out of specific, difficult-to-forget experiences. Like, say, being almost certain you are about to die.

The stories told to the children in *Signs*, surrounded by fear and trembling, bring about healing. When it seemed as though the end was near, a father tells his children their birth narratives. Stories often function in this way, adaptable and ready to be employed at a moment's notice, beyond walls built of stone and over borders drawn by hand. Stories can make a depressed person see hope where none was before. Stories can change our very reality.

—

Matthew's Jesus is *particularly* busy today — take note of how many action verbs there are (and they all apply to him, of course) packed into barely eleven verses in the 14th chapter:

He makes the disciples get into the boat (1); he dismisses the crowds (2); he goes up a mountain (completely alone, by the way, as was his norm) to pray (3); he then approaches the disciples (walking *on the water*, no big deal) (4); he tells Peter to walk to him (5); he then catches that same Rock, Petros, so that the man of little faith doesn't lose his life entirely (6).

And he's busy doing things his disciples don't fully understand. (This could be the tagline of most of the Gospel narrative.) Spending time alone praying on a mountain, and then walking towards them early in the morning after a night of presumable confusion, as though he were a ghost — it's understandable that they wouldn't get it. Do we, fully?

Once they realize it's Jesus (the *New Revised Standard Version's* stilted "It is I" is probably better rendered "I Am," especially since the entire episode has echoes of Exodus with Jesus descending from the mountain; it makes sense that it would have echoes, too, of the unpronounceable name of God, *I Am that I Am*, but I, umm, wildly digress) Doubting Peter demands further proof. "If it really *is* you," he shouts, "command me to do the same thing!"

Jesus shrugs. "Come on out here," he motions. But Peter soon realizes he's in way over his head (as was his norm), while the rest of the disciples continue to play it safe inside the boat. Once Peter is rescued, everyone in the boat finally gets the memo: "Truly you are the Son of God," Matthew reports, although I can imagine some other things being shouted that were a bit less pious.

It's a really good story, isn't it?

I wonder if, near the end, Jesus remembered some of these earlier moments as Matthew's Gospel tells them. I wonder if he told them to himself in the garden called Gethsemane, or as he made his way to the cross on Calvary. I wonder if Mary, or Thomas, or Bartholomew, or even Peter himself happened to pull him aside later and say, "Do you remember that time when you walked on the water?"

Given the appalling violence that attended his own birth narrative (and by this I mean Matthew's very specific account of a childhood altered by barely escaping mass genocide and living as a refugee in Egypt for many formative years), I sometimes wonder if Jesus wasn't traumatized throughout his entire life. What if this story of walking on the water acted as a healing balm for himself later in his earthly journey?

Whether or not Jesus remembered it, the Jesus community, those following *The Way*, **absolutely remembered it**, because here I am, preaching about it.

It's important to recognize that the Bible isn't an historical account (with very rare exceptions); it is instead primarily a collection of *stories*. And the stories they collected were the ones they told around campfires for generations upon generations, all the way up to us. The community connected to what we call the Gospel of St. Matthew may have been the original audience, but they were by no means the last.

Generations of Jesus followers for centuries, *millennia*, have heard this story, of how Jesus walked on water, of how Peter tried to do the same but fear got the best of him...and yet, how hope survived. Jesus is Lord of heaven and earth — how, indeed, can we stop from singing?

—

Birth narratives comforted the children in *Signs*, just as this narrative continues to comfort me in my mental struggles.

In the Year of our Lord, 2020, I think we could *all* use just a little more comfort. As the sounds of fear-driven politics and the scratches of white supremacy inch closer and closer to us, we as Jesus followers can be bold.

We can choose to tell stories of strength being shown through weakness in the face of a society that worships the almighty Dollar. We can tell stories of resistance in the face of police brutality. We can tell stories of hope in the face of anything but.

We can all put down our hammers and tell stories of life and love in the face of the raging flood. That's what these stories are meant for.

Prayers of Intercession

As members of the Body of Christ, gathered here and across the world, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need.

Creator God, we thank and praise you for the planet earth, our home—faithfully spinning in its orbit; for sunset and sunrise, rain and sunshine, winter and summer, the seas and the sky so far away, the hills and rivers surrounding to this place. God, you are always faithful to finish the work you begin. Breathe your Spirit into us, that we may be a new creation. Teach us to be good stewards of all that you have made. Lord, in your mercy. **Hear our Prayer.**

Righteous God, all nations belong to you. Bring your peace upon earth—not a “guilty” peace of compromises with evil, but a peace that allows itself to be disturbed by injustice and wrongdoing. Give justice to the weak, food to the hungry, rescue to the needy. And whether we like it or not, make us instruments and channels of your peace. Lord, in your mercy. **Hear our Prayer.**

Lord, we bring “alleluias” for our joys... for birthdays, anniversaries, healings, and celebrations of those we name now... *pause* ...

We pray for those who mourn; those who are ill, those having surgery or tests, those with hurts of body, mind, or soul, (especially). Grant your healing presence in our midst. Lord, in your mercy. **Hear our Prayer.**

Gracious Spirit, intercede for us with sighs too deep for words; keep us in true faith; and gather us with the whole church on earth, into the communion of the triune God.

Amen.

Thanksgiving for the Word

We bless you, faithful God, for your holy Word that sustains us in hope. Your Word creates anew each day and brings forth blessing. For your Word of grace, O God, **we give you thanks and praise!**

Your Word has fed your people throughout the journey in times of joy and challenge; struggle and celebration. Continue to feed us with your Word of life, O God, **that we may abound in faith!**

Jesus embodied your Word of love and gave himself as your everlasting promise. Teach us his ways of love and service to our neighbor. Through your Word of Jesus, **equip us to share your love and life with the world!**

In thanks and praise for your living Word to heal the world, Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray:

Lord’s Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
forever and ever.

Amen.

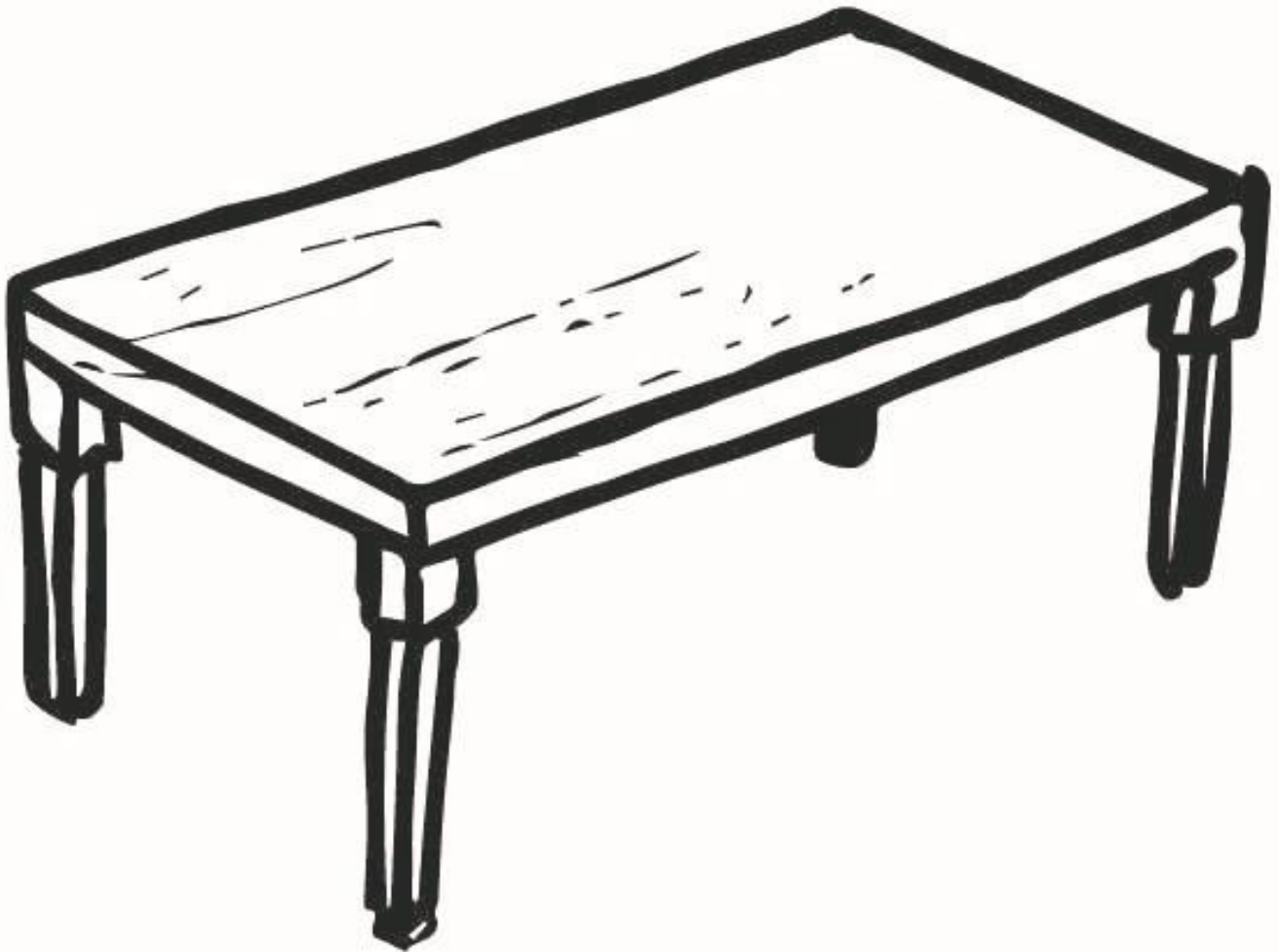
Closing Prayer

As we move from this time of worship, we rejoice O Lord that your peace abides with us. May it give us the patience and resilience to faithfully serve you with acts of love for our brothers and sisters even from our homes.

Amen.

ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

August 16, 2020



ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

August 16, 2020

Call To Worship

May the peoples praise you, God;
may all the peoples praise you O Lord.

May the nations be glad and sing for joy,
may all the peoples praise you O Lord.

The land yields its harvest;
God, our God, blesses us.
may all the peoples praise you O Lord.

(adapted from Psalm 67)

Prayer of the Day

Gracious, merciful, and abundant Lord, the mere crumbs from your table provide us more than we could ever need. Send your Holy Spirit to shine a light in the darkness of our lives that we may be nourished through the presence and grace of your Son Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord.

Amen.

Gospel - Matthew 15:21-28

²¹ Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. ²² A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly." ²³ Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, "Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us." ²⁴ He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel." ²⁵ The woman came and knelt before him. "Lord, help me!" she said. ²⁶ He replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs." ²⁷ "Yes it is, Lord," she said. "Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table." ²⁸ Then Jesus said to her, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed at that moment.

Sermon - Rev. Bob Abrams, Assistant to the Bishop, Southern Ohio Synod

Grace and peace be with you today from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Imagine this scene: a faithful pastor, a pastor who was extremely popular but sometimes controversial, lay sick on his deathbed. This man was known to be bold, brash, and opinionated, but preached so clearly about Jesus that people sought him out. He was the type of man who seemed so certain in his faith that he inspired others – but he was also brutally honest, and sometimes downright rude. He wasn't a very good provider of pastoral care to people; that just wasn't his style, so it was probably good that he became more of an academic pastor and teacher. But here he was, this larger-than-life character, with almost no life left in him. There were a lot of tears around that bed for those few days he was sick. His was a voice in this world that would be hard to replace. It was going to be a tough loss.

When the pastor finally died, one of his friends who was there saw that there was a piece of paper in his pocket. He pulled out that piece of paper, and on it were these words: "We are all beggars. This is true."

That pastor was Martin Luther. And that short, brutally honest note summed up his faith. We come to God with nothing. But God gives us everything.

Luther's note also helps us to understand, even if just a little bit, the position of the Canaanite woman in Matthew's story as she approached Jesus that day. Why a Canaanite woman? You see, Jesus had traveled to the north of his home territory of Galilee to an area that would today be in southern Lebanon. In that region, they were known for continuing to worship Baal. (Remember that god from the Old Testament?). We don't know why Jesus went. But we do know this: his power to heal the sick had made him so famous that even a foreign, non-Jewish woman from a different district knew who he was. So much so that she decided to approach him, a non-Jew approaching a Jewish Rabbi, to beg him to come and heal her daughter. Matthew tells us that this girl was "tormented by a demon", and that this woman was so desperate that she came to Jesus "shouting."

I wonder how many of us have felt that kind of desperation in our own lives; how many of us have been at the bedside of a sick child, or a sick spouse, or parent, or other loved one. Or how many of us have lost a job, and wondered how we might keep a roof over our heads, food on the table, and the lights on. Or, more personally, how many of us have drifted so far from God in our hearts and minds, have ventured into the kind of life, or behavior, or attitude, that makes us feel yet even more separate from him? In these kinds of moments, and so many more, we come to Jesus as desperate beggars: feeling, even knowing, that we have nothing to offer, but hoping against hope that he will help us.

This must be how that Canaanite woman felt that day. She knew that she had nothing to offer Jesus, but she knew that she had everything to lose if she didn't ask. So, ask she did; actually, she shouted. And shouted. And shouted.

What does Matthew tell us was Jesus' response? A stone, cold silence.

Isn't this her worst nightmare? Absolutely nothing word from Jesus here. He just kept walking by. Matthew says, "but he did not answer her at all." In fact, the only reason he said anything at all about this poor, desperate woman (not to her at first, but to his disciples) is because her incessant shouting annoyed the disciples, and they asked him to shut her up by sending her away. (Notice that they didn't ask him to help her, which is yet even more disturbing). He just said to them: "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the House of Israel". In other words, "nope. I'm not even responding. She's an outsider."

I think this is probably our worst nightmare too. How many of us have prayed, even in desperation, only to hear a stone-cold silence in response? How many of us have had times where we felt that everything was on the line, but did not get the response from God we were absolutely sure we needed at that time? How many of us have come to God empty-handed, and felt like we just plain hit a wall in prayer? How many of us have ever felt so guilty, so weighed down with sin, that we feel like we're not worthy to ask God for anything?

It's times like these where we look to Jesus for comfort; but it's stories like these where we see a Jesus who isn't comforting. How could Jesus treat someone in need this way? How could a loving Jesus just walk away from a begging, pleading woman, outsider or not?

If we sometimes feel like that Canaanite woman must have felt; if we sometimes feel that all we can do is shout for, and maybe even at God because we have nothing else left to do; if we sometimes feel that we are simply beggars at Jesus' feet, then maybe we can understand what this woman said next. When Jesus said "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs", she responded: "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." In other words, this woman knew that even a tiny amount of what Jesus had to offer would be enough. She was empty handed, but what Jesus could give her is everything.

Matthew tells us that Jesus was astounded at her faith. Here she was, a woman who didn't even belong to the people of God, a woman whose name we do not know, placing her trust in Jesus unconditionally, with an open heart, and with empty hands. A beggar who had nothing, talking to the Lord who could give her, and her daughter, everything. "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish", Jesus said. And her daughter was set free of her torment.

Now, at first blush, it seems that this this woman just had enough faith that Jesus did what she asked. Have you ever heard that said to you? (even by a TV preacher? "If you have enough faith, God will heal you (or your loved one).") Or "if you have enough faith, you will be healthy, wealthy, and successful".

I wish I could speak to you today and tell you that Jesus will give you whatever you ask, whenever you ask it, if you just shout long and hard enough at him. Not only is that kind of

thinking dangerous to faith, it's not how God's grace and love work. This story isn't about having enough faith to create an alternate reality to our own; it's not about 'willing' Jesus to become our sort of "genie in a bottle", giving us our every desire. No, that's not what happened on that day at all. And we know that's not our own experience. We know that death is a part of life. And we know that bad things do happen to good, faithful people. Because the fact is, even though we are God's children, with seats at God's table, we don't always get what we want or ask. Sometimes not even close.

But what this story does tell us is that even the smallest crumb from God, the tiniest morsel; the smallest wind from God that blows in our lives, the stillest, smallest movements that we can barely see; even the tiniest drop from our Lord's cup, the smallest drip on our parched tongues: all of these are enough. This story tells us that in this world of uncertainty, in this life where anxiety, and loss, and fear, and death seem like they can shake the very foundations of our faith, in all of this, Jesus is enough. Jesus will always be enough for what we need.

We may not know how God will move, or even when; we may not know how God will weave together the broken strands of our lives; but we are assured of this: God knows what we need before we ask. God knows every hair on our heads. God knows each of us by name. And, the Scriptures tell us, no matter who we are, or what we've done, God loved us first. Jesus came to us, and died on the cross for us, while we were still sinners, first. And because in him and his resurrection, God has defeated sin and death, including our own, without us bringing anything at all to the relationship. We may come empty-handed, but God has already given us with everything.

So when our prayer lives seem to be dry or dead; when we feel in our bones that God cannot possibly forgive us for that same sin one more time; when we are faced with tremendous loss, and simply can't feel God's presence in it; when we don't know when the job we need will come; when we don't know when we can return to worship in our church in a "normal" way in the midst of a pandemic; in all of these things, Jesus, yes, even the tiniest crumbs of Jesus, are enough. Enough to make good out of even the worst times in our lives; enough to shine light in a dark space in our hearts and minds; enough to forgive us more times than we can imagine; enough to bring life from even death itself.

What the woman that day showed us is that it is at his feet, when we have nothing to give, when we are at our most desperate; when we are, as Luther said, nothing more than beggars; that is where, and that is when, Jesus's power is truly made visible. When the power of God, as Paul wrote, is made perfect in our weakness.

"We are all beggars. This is true." Glory be to God. Because that is when Jesus does his best work. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

As members of the Body of Christ, gathered here and across the world, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need.

May God be merciful to us and bless us - God you welcome all peoples in your presence. The neighbor and the stranger. The broken and the whole. The friend and the enemy. The sinner and the saint. Pour out your Spirit of welcome on us and give us the power to bless those we encounter on the journey as your people. Lord, in your mercy.

Hear our Prayer.

Let your way be known upon the earth - In the midst of so much violence in our nation and in the world, send your presence of peace and comfort. Be with those who call out in pain cry out for your mercy. Help us to be advocates for your kingdom of forgiveness, love, and peace. Empower us to be witnesses to your love for the world. Lord, in your mercy.

Hear our Prayer.

Do not be a stranger to our needs - We pray for those who mourn. Bring healing, courage, and peace for those who are ill, those hospitalized, those facing tests or surgery (especially). Lord, in your mercy.

Hear our Prayer.

Gracious Spirit, intercede for us with sighs too deep for words; keep us in true faith; and gather us with the whole church on earth, into the communion of the triune God.

Amen.

Thanksgiving for the Word

We bless you, faithful God, for your holy Word that sustains us in hope. Your Word creates anew each day and brings forth blessing. For your Word of grace, O God, **we give you thanks and praise!**

Your Word has fed your people throughout the journey in times of joy and challenge; struggle and celebration. Continue to feed us with your Word of life, O God, **that we may abound in faith!**

Jesus embodied your Word of love and gave himself as your everlasting promise. Teach us his ways of love and service to our neighbor. Through your Word of Jesus, **equip us to share your love and life with the world!**

In thanks and praise for your living Word to heal the world, Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray:

Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
forever and ever.

Amen.

Closing Prayer

As we move from this time of worship, we rejoice O Lord that your peace abides with us. May it give us the patience and resilience to faithfully serve you with acts of love for our brothers and sisters even from our homes.

Amen.

TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

August 23, 2020



TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

August 23, 2020

Call To Worship

May all the kings of the earth praise you, Lord,
for the glory of the Lord is great

You stretch out your hand against the anger of my foes;
with your right hand you save me.
for the glory of the Lord is great

I will bow down toward your holy temple
and will praise your name
for the glory of the Lord is great

(adapted from Psalm 138)

Prayer of the Day

O God, the Father of our Lord Jesus, you sent your Son to bring faith, hope, and love to all people the world over. Empower the church that we might be fueled by our relationship with you and share with the world Jesus' abundance of grace, love, acceptance, and hope.
Amen.

Gospel - Matthew 16:13-20

¹³ When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" ¹⁴ They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." ¹⁵ "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" ¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." ¹⁷ Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. ¹⁸ And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. ¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." ²⁰ Then he ordered his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

Sermon - Rev. Matthew Kamprath, Pastor, First Lutheran Church, Geneseo, IL

Jesus asks the disciples today, who do others say that I am? And the disciples all respond in ways that make me think they too are trying to figure out the answer for themselves. You

could almost put a question mark behind every one of their responses. Some say that you are John the Baptist? Others say that you are Elijah? Still others say Jeremiah, or one of the prophets, is that the right answer? But none of these long gone prophets are who Jesus is.

So Jesus then moves to the point, by asking the disciples directly, "But who do you say that I am?" Notice that Jesus never gives in and says who he is. It is Peter, who takes the plunge and says something more definitive. There is no question mark at the end of his statement, but a period. He says, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God". Bingo Peter, you have hit the nail on the head. Peter takes a stand confessing something impossible about Jesus' identity, and it seems like he has the right answer, for he is rewarded. He is made the rock on which the church will be built, and he is given the keys to the kingdom. I'm sure Peter was on top of the world, however, I don't think it lasted very long.

We often forget what happens directly after this scene, for the gospel reading ends today with Jesus sternly ordering the disciples to not tell anyone this secret of Jesus' Messianic identity. What follows this is Jesus beginning to show the disciples what him as Messiah means. It means that he must go to Jerusalem, undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.

I don't think Peter likes this idea. Peter wants to stop this from happening to Jesus and is probably upset that Jesus is so willingly going that way and openly talking about this mission when he probably had other ideas of what a Messiah would do. Peter, and others like him, were certainly ready for an anointed king who would lead them out of their current situation, conquered and oppressed by the Roman Empire, into the glory of their former past.

Peter, I believe, hopes for this to come to pass, even if that means going to battle for the cause, and he will stop Jesus from being a Messiah who loses. "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you." Peter says this with exclamation and he is rebuked harshly by Jesus to get behind him with exclamation. I imagine Peter going from the mountaintop of pride, to a very low place of humiliation. I think Peter was certain about **who** the Messiah was, but was off the mark with **what** the Messiah would do.

There have been many times in my life, where I have been certain about who someone is, based on appearance, attitude, or their actions, and I have been made a fool time and time again, by who people really are at heart. We often desire people that we love to be someone other than who they are, but I don't believe this to be love, but rather control and manipulation.

Peter wasn't ready to let Jesus be in control and lose his understanding of what the Messiah was to do. He takes this stubbornness all the way to Jesus' end. And at the end, Peter will be given yet another chance at confessing Jesus as Messiah after Jesus is arrested. This time however, he really messes up by denying three times even knowing him. Peter hoped for so much more than a loser and he didn't want to be one himself.

The good news is that Jesus is more than anyone could hope for. Jesus is more than what Peter could hope for. This Messiah, the Son of the living God, has saved us from our constant

need for there to be winners and losers by becoming that which we despise, a loser. The truth is, we are all in need of saving, for we are all as lost as Peter.

We would think that Peter should be stripped of the gift to be the rock upon which the church has been built. We would think that the keys to the kingdom should be taken away, from him, but thankfully Jesus hoped for so much more in Peter. Jesus didn't take away Peter's worth, but built him up to be so much more knowing all the time that he would disappoint and fail as disciple.

Jesus hopes for us to be so much more, which strangely enough, means that we be so much less. Peter in his time, understood this to be true as he continued to grow into the One he confessed to be the Messiah, the Son of the living God.

We in our time, are invited to be so much more than the petty differences which continue to separate and divide us. We are called to be so much more than our stubbornness and pride. We are called to be so much more than our need for power and control. We are called to hope in so much more than in things that will turn to dust, and ideologies which hold us fast. We are called and invited to be so much more open to what is. We are called to hope for healing and redemption that has come in Jesus Christ and is still to come. We are called to cling to hope in the midst of this pandemic which has stoked the fires of division, uncertainty, stubbornness, evil, and death, all of which seems to be winning, because we have placed our hope in this loser, Jesus Christ.

And when we just can't be more or will not be all who God created us to be, may we get lost in the Love of God, which is a Love that is stronger than our pride, Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

As members of the Body of Christ, gathered here and across the world, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need.

God of abundance - You have drawn us to yourself in our need. When we thirst, you have provided water; when we grow hungry, you have provided food; when we long for company, you have knit together a community of people in your image. We thank you for your abundant blessings. Lord, in your mercy.

Hear our Prayer.

God of power and might - You poured out your Holy Spirit on Paul as he shaped communities and called people into a life of following Jesus. Empower us by your Holy Spirit, so that we may serve you faithfully, be witnesses to you life-saving good news, and invite others to follow us in a life of discipleship. Lord, in your mercy.

Hear our Prayer.

God of healing and wholeness - Nurture faith in those who doubt. Lift up those who are weak in body, mind, or spirit. Heal the sick, comfort the grieving, be with those in need,

(especially). Grant peace to those who mourn and renew them in the promises of life and life eternal. Lord, in your mercy.

Hear our Prayer.

Gracious Spirit, intercede for us with sighs too deep for words; keep us in true faith; and gather us with the whole church on earth, into the communion of the triune God.

Amen.

Thanksgiving for the Word

We bless you, faithful God, for your holy Word that sustains us in hope. Your Word creates anew each day and brings forth blessing. For your Word of grace, O God, **we give you thanks and praise!**

Your Word has fed your people throughout the journey in times of joy and challenge; struggle and celebration. Continue to feed us with your Word of life, O God, **that we may abound in faith!**

Jesus embodied your Word of love and gave himself as your everlasting promise. Teach us his ways of love and service to our neighbor. Through your Word of Jesus, **equip us to share your love and life with the world!**

In thanks and praise for your living Word to heal the world, Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray:

Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
forever and ever.

Amen.

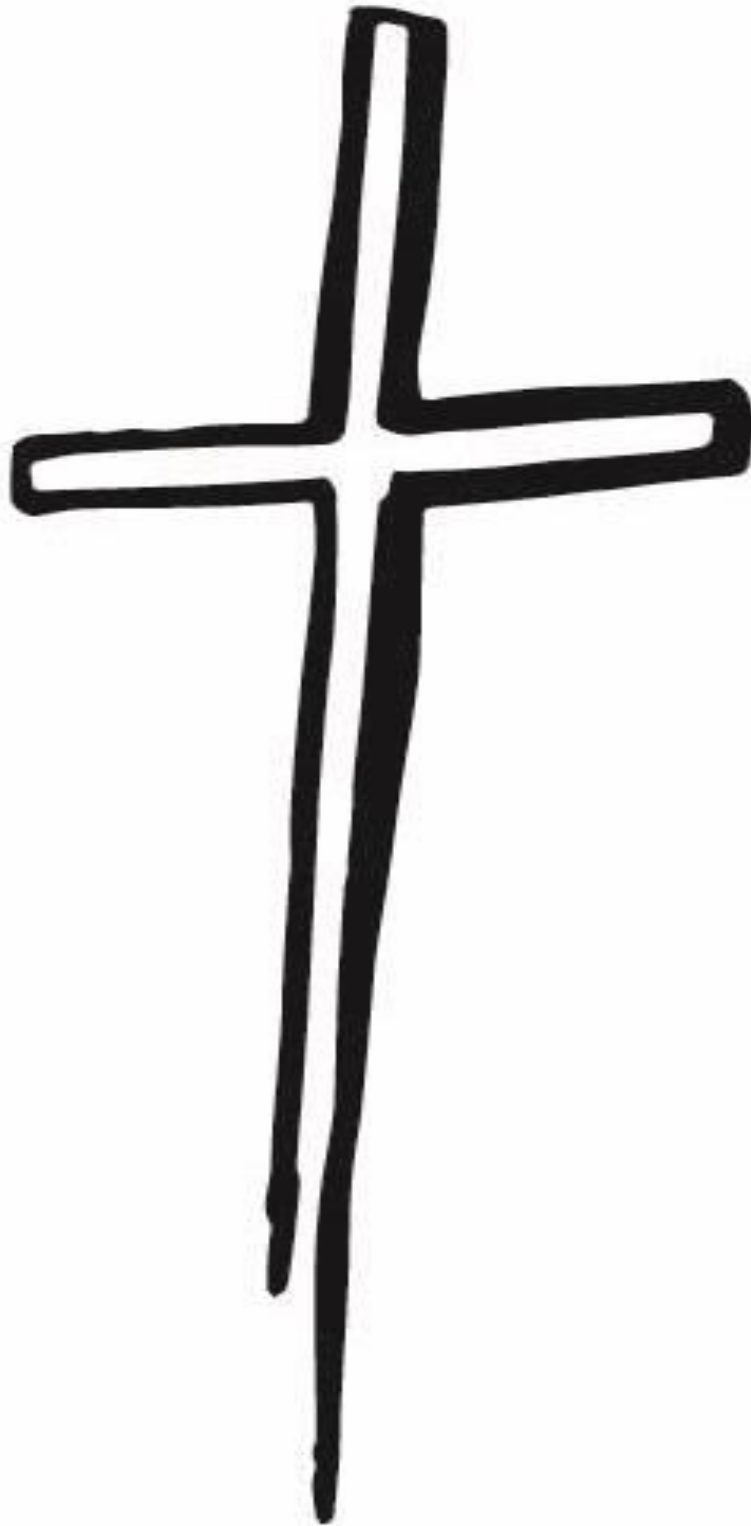
Closing Prayer

As we move from this time of worship, we rejoice O Lord that your peace abides with us. May it give us the patience and resilience to faithfully serve you with acts of love for our brothers and sisters even from our homes.

Amen.

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

August 30, 2020



THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

August 30, 2020

Call To Worship

Lord, I have always been mindful of your unfailing love
in the great congregation I will praise the Lord.

I have lived in reliance on your faithfulness
in the great congregation I will praise the Lord.

Lord, I love the house where you live,
in the great congregation I will praise the Lord.

(adapted from Psalm 26)

Prayer of the Day

God of faithfulness, oceans rise, and mountains fall yet you remain steadfast in your love and care for us. The words of scripture tell the story of you faithfully delivering your people time after time. Undergird our faith and strengthen our trust in you through the abundant power and promises of your son, Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord.

Amen.

Gospel - Matthew 16:21-28

²¹ From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. ²² Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!" ²³ Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns." ²⁴ Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. ²⁶ What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? ²⁷ For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done. ²⁸ "Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

Sermon - Rev. Paul Jones Moody, Pastor, Messiah Lutheran Church, Cleveland, OH

It is often said that we as humans are “creatures of habit”. We tend to find patterns and rhythms of life that give us a sense of predictability and direction. We rely on seasons (civic, religious, and ecological) to anchor us through times of change, and we often find ourselves marking the passage of time with varying expressions and rituals and traditions that help us interpret our realities and make sense of life.

And of course, typically, this last leg of August is one of those transition periods that is marked by a variety of seasonal shifts: students prepare to return to classes, Church communities prepare Rally Days and “God’s Work, Our Hands” Sundays, and Starbucks gets ready for the deluge of the Pumpkin Spice Lattes that are to come.

But this year is different.

This seasonal transition is not the same as it usually is, and it is easy to feel unmoored when our usual rituals and practices can’t keep us as steady as we’d perhaps like to be.

Life has a way of shifting before us, often more rapidly than we are comfortable with. And dear Disciple Peter, a close confidant with Jesus in Matthew’s Gospel, is also no stranger to the kinds of shifting circumstances that are so common in our lives. For his narrative tells of life of rapid change: moving from a full-time fishing professional to a wandering disciple, following Jesus from town to town. But this transition is fruitful, for his close proximity to Jesus allows him to witness more of Jesus’ life than most of the others in the Gospel story, and reveals for us how Jesus navigates all the ups and the downs that the Gospel story leads us through.

And today’s Gospel selection leads us right through another major narrative transition, with Peter at the fore. For, just a handful of verses ago, Jesus asked, “Who do you say that I am?” And Peter responds, “You are Messiah, the son of God!” [****ding ding ding ding ding!****]. But in a matter of mere sentences, Peter goes from the star student to the one who needs to re-learn the lesson, as he rejects the direction where this Messiah is leading: the cross.

It’s not hard to understand that Peter would reject such a path. After all, how can the Messiah deliver Israel from Rome’s oppressive, heavy hand if he’s dead? And if his followers are executed, as well? That’s not a recipe for the kind of deliverance the people need, it seems.

Yet, the deliverance Jesus brings goes beyond what his followers expect.

Yes, Jesus seeks to deliver his people from oppression and exploitation and the Roman occupation that has not given them peace. But he also seeks to deliver his people from the systems of power and control that they think will save them.

Jesus' deliverance subverts and disarms power, and exposes its lies. It transforms relationships, and lives, and hearts, and minds, and makes a new way that even undoes the power of death itself, so that people might be healed from fear and can live abundantly and unafraid!

Yet fear is a powerful societal motivator, and when those who wield its power have it taken from them, they rarely respond generously. We witness this over and over again in our communities, in the national news, and around the world. But the ministry of Jesus contends against this. The ministry of Jesus reveals for us that God is at work in and through such cycles of death, and is part of creating a new reality where relationships are made right, across the board: religious, civic, interpersonal, intrapersonal. Which is the very cycle of death and resurrection that we experience over and over again! This is not an easy cycle, as Prophet Jeremiah testifies to, and as Apostle Paul testifies to as well.

Yet thankfully God is faithful in bringing us through to new life, even as our ways of death continue to be deconstructed. For we need such resurrection, not only in the mystery of the life that is to come, but every morning that we awake. As Luther encourages in the Catechism, perhaps we might begin each day with a simple prayer:

"I give thanks to you, my heavenly Father through Jesus Christ your dear son, that you have protected me this night from all harm and danger, and I ask you that you would also protect me today from sin and all evil, so that my life and actions may please you completely. For into your hands I commend myself: my body, my soul, and all that is mine. Let your holy angel be with me, so that the wicked foe may have no power over me. Amen."

We have already been delivered into a new day. What will we then do? How will we respond? In what ways will we continue to embrace the good changes God brings?

May you know God's presence with you even this day. May you know God's faithfulness with you as seasons change, as empires rise and fall, as fear grips us, as we misstep and question which way we ought to go next. May you know, this day, that the saints have been guided through many a challenge in ages past, and that we too will be guided through in our world, now, today. May you know the true peace of God that endures, even now, even in this season, in this moment, in this time of the unknown.

May it be so. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

As members of the Body of Christ, gathered here and across the world, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need.

God of our life and our salvation - your son Jesus took up his cross for the sake of all people. Jesus has called us to follow him into a life of humble service and love. Empower us to follow in his footsteps. Pour out your Spirit upon us, so that we may serve others in life-giving love. Lord, in your mercy.

Hear our Prayer.

God of plenty and peace - We thank you for all that you have given us. Empower us to be god stewards of your creation. In the midst of so much violence in our nation and in the world, send your presence of peace and comfort. Help us to bless and not to curse, rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep, and to repay evil for evil. Lord, in your mercy.

Hear our Prayer.

God of all life - Make us free to be whole and healthy persons, God of grace. Give respite to caregivers, infuse medical workers with skill, inspire scientists to find cures, and make us well in mind, body, and soul. We pray for those in need of healing (especially). Grant your healing presence in our lives.

Lord, in your mercy.

Hear our Prayer.

Gracious Spirit, intercede for us with sighs too deep for words; keep us in true faith; and gather us with the whole church on earth, into the communion of the triune God.

Amen.

Thanksgiving for the Word

We bless you, faithful God, for your holy Word that sustains us in hope. Your Word creates anew each day and brings forth blessing. For your Word of grace, O God, **we give you thanks and praise!**

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thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses,

as we forgive those
who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
forever and ever.

Amen.

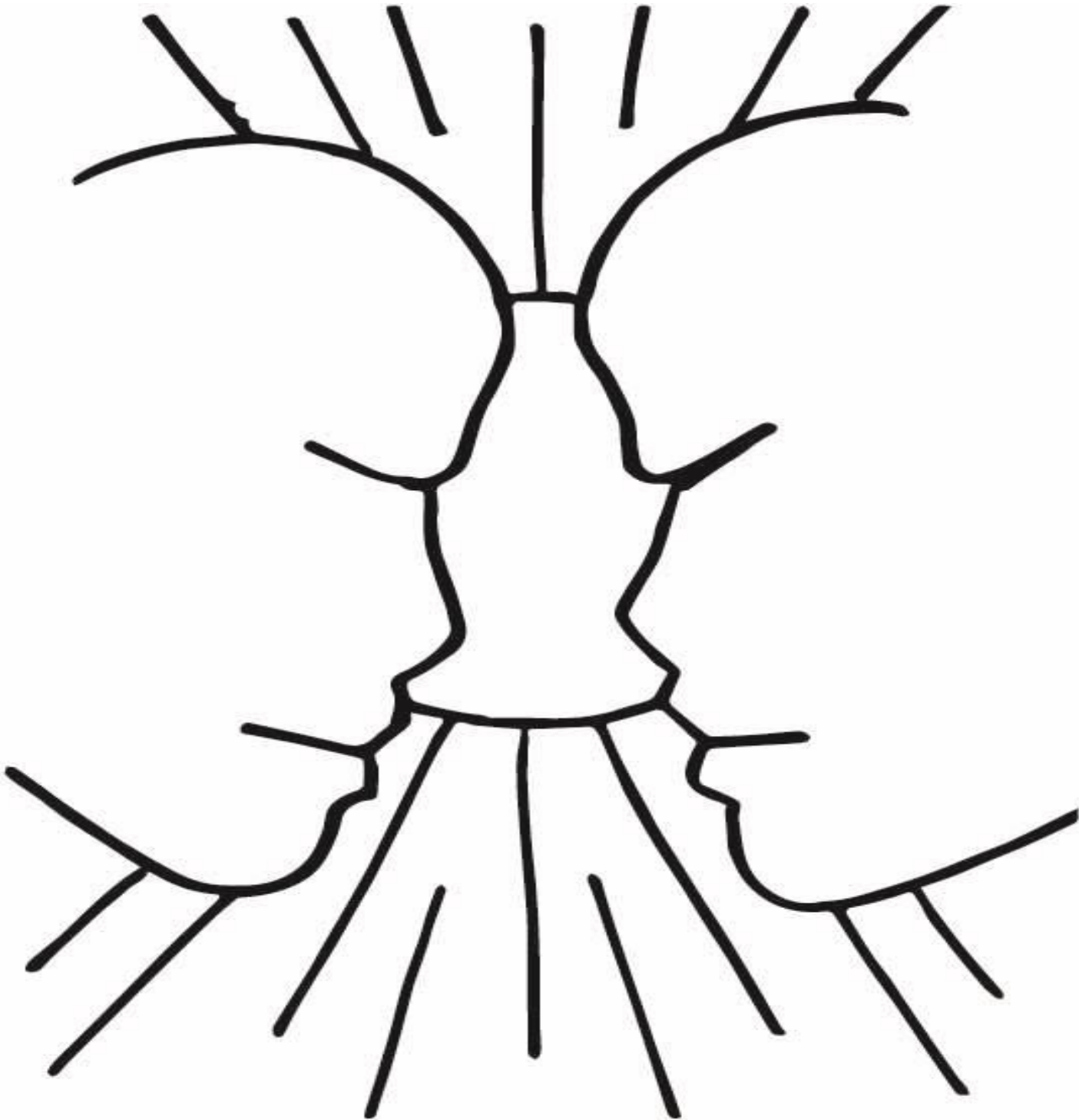
Closing Prayer

As we move from this time of worship, we rejoice O Lord that your peace abides with us. May it give us the patience and resilience to faithfully serve you with acts of love for our brothers and sisters even from our homes.

Amen.

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

September 6, 2020



FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

September 6, 2020

Call To Worship

Teach me, Lord, the way of your decrees

preserve my life according to your word

Direct me in the path of your commands,

preserve my life according to your word

Fulfill your promise to your servant,

preserve my life according to your word

(adapted from Psalm 119)

Prayer of the Day

Merciful God, you sent your Son in an act of love for all of creation. In these days of anxiety, aggravation, and frustration grant us the grace, power, and patience to engage the world with your peace and love that pass all understanding. This we ask of you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

Gospel - Romans 13:8-14

⁸Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. ⁹The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not covet,"^[a] and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."^[b] ¹⁰Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. ¹¹And do this, understanding the present time: The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. ¹²The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. ¹³Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. ¹⁴Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.

Sermon - Rev. M. Jill King, Pastor, Our Savior Lutheran Church, Durham, NC

I am preparing this message in July for worship in early September. A beloved, familiar, yet an odd kind of task. Four months into coping with the life changing modifications brought upon us as we cope with the reality of the COVID-19 Virus.

In North Carolina, many communities of faith are either worshipping via Zoom, Facebook, or another format. A few are having drive-in worship services where people come to church and sit in their respective cars. During this time, the people of Our Savior, Durham enjoy to connecting with one another via Zoom. On-line worship begins at 11:00, following a time of social interaction and connection at 10:30. We truly miss gathering together for worship, in a format that provides opportunities for us to greet one another in Christian fellowship and love, pass the peace, sing hymns of faith together, and gather around God's table of mercy, grace and love. For such a time as this, we long for and pray.

In addition to serving as the part-time pastor at Our Savior Lutheran Church, for the past year I have been working as a cashier at a friend's convenience store. The store is located near both my home and church. Many of the customers have known me for years. Others since I started (officially) working at the store. Some are regular customers who come by the store every day. Others stop by the store because they have a medical appointment at Duke University Medical Center. Some happen to be in the area. Unfortunately, a few come solely to rob and/or steal.

The stresses of living under local orders for face masks and social distancing, at a time when many are presently laid-off or unemployed, are noticeable in all. Patience, tolerance, and understanding are short-lived. Tempers flare. Common courtesies have seemingly gone by the wayside. Instead of reaching out to and caring for others, many have adapted by becoming even more self-centered.

To the Roman church, in advance of his arrival, Paul writes:

⁸Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. ⁹The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet"; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, "Love your neighbor as yourself." ¹⁰Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law."

Love one another. Loving others is sometimes difficult task. Especially when we consider the needs those who defy and blatantly ignore local orders with regards to wearing masks in public places and keeping social distance, those who think that the world revolves around them, those who are noticeably self-centered, angry, arrogant and rude. And even more difficult, especially for me, are those who intentionally come to the store to rob and to steal.

I wonder. Are there people in your family, neighborhood, places of employment or members of your congregation, who are difficult for you love or to reach out to, in Christian fellowship. Perhaps there are others you encounter while you are driving or running errands with whom it is difficult to do no wrong. Are there people who may not be welcomed as members of your congregation who need to experience the love of a neighbor or encounter you clothed in the armor of light. Or to experience for themselves the love of God that we have in Christ

Jesus via a smile, a bottle of cold water, food for the table, a tank full of gas, words of encouragement and hope, an offer of prayer or an expression of gratitude for essential personnel.

May the love of God that we have in Christ Jesus, be with you, be gracious towards you, strengthen you in Christian fellowship and love, and give you peace.
Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

Open to the gifts of the Holy Spirit, we pray for the church, the world, and all of God's creation.

God of grace, we pray for the church universal. Reconcile our differences. Forgive our divisions. Unite us at your table. Continue to empower us by your Spirit, to be the body of Christ in the world. Lord, in your mercy.

Hear our Prayer.

God of the kingdom, you sent your son into the world not to condemn, but to show us who you are. Through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection you showed us the depth of your love. In our darkness Jesus provides light. Strengthen our faithfulness in you and in each other. Lord, in your mercy.

Hear our Prayer.

God of blessings, we give you thanks for all you have blessed us with. Bring joy in the lives of those celebrating birthdays, anniversaries, and significant moments. Help those who struggle with depression and anxiety. Uplift those who find each day a struggle. Bring healing to the sick, (especially). Lord, in your mercy.

Hear our Prayer.

Trusting in your mercy and goodness, we bring before you these prayers and whatever else you see that we need, in the name of the one who sets us free, Jesus Christ, our Savior.

Amen.

Thanksgiving for the Word

We bless you merciful God, for your holy Word that forgives and gives life. In your Word, peace and reconciliation is created and offered for all. For your Word of grace, O God, **we give you thanks and praise!**

Your living Word abounds in steadfast love showing grace and mercy to all generations. Continue to sustain us by your Word of life, O God, **that we may know your forgiveness!**

Jesus is your humble word, caring for the neighbor to share the life of God. Through your Word of Jesus, O God, **inspire us to humbly care for the needs of the world!**

In thanks and praise for your Word of mercy and grace, Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray:

Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
forever and ever.

Amen.

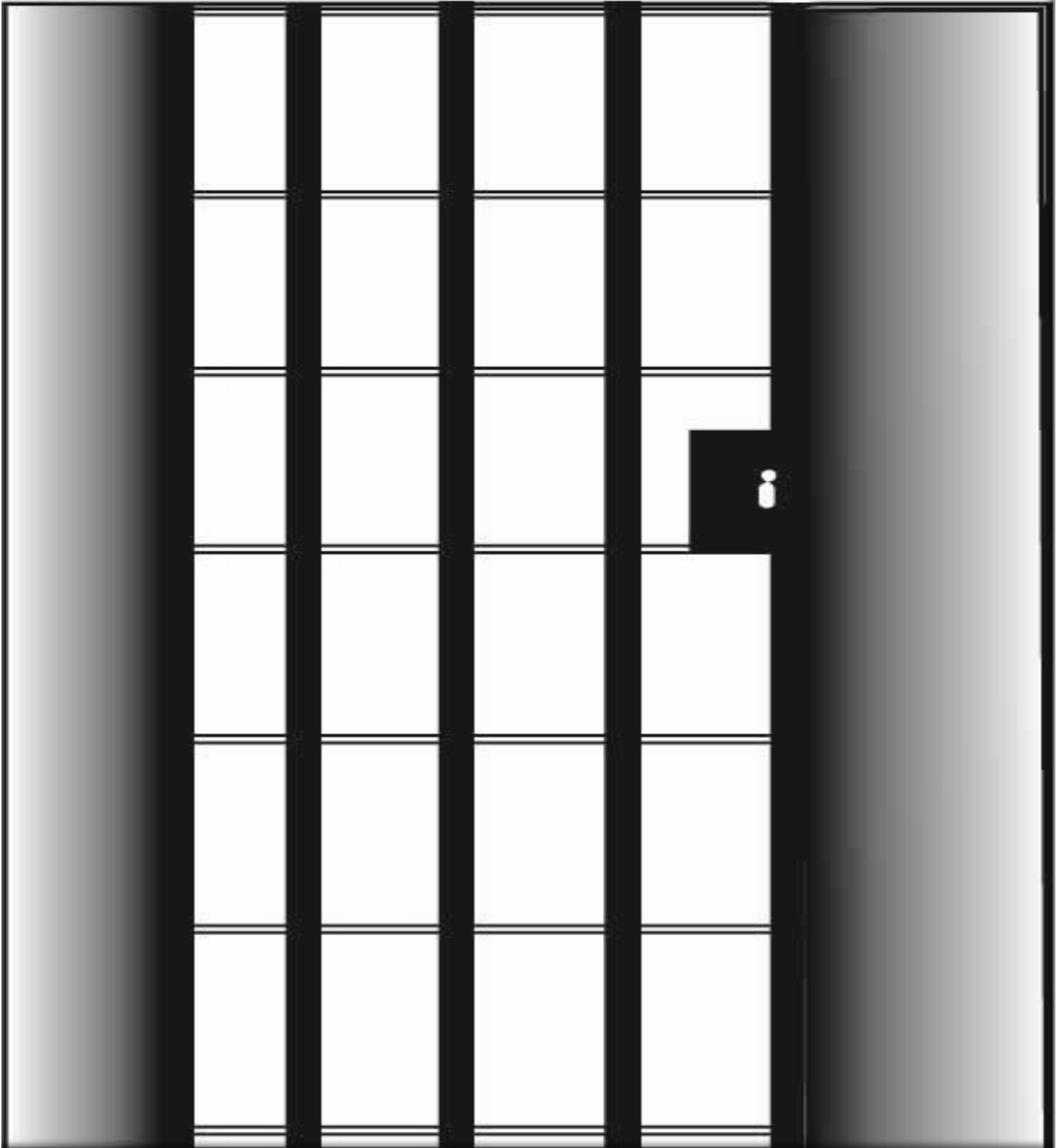
Closing Prayer

As we move from this time of worship, we rejoice O Lord that your peace abides with us. May it give us the patience and resilience to faithfully serve you with acts of love for our brothers and sisters even from our homes.

Amen.

FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

September 13, 2020



FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

September 13, 2020

Call To Worship

The Lord works righteousness
and justice for all the oppressed
Praise the Lord, O my soul.

The Lord forgives all your sins,
Praise the Lord, O my soul.

The Lord satisfies your desires with good things,
Praise the Lord, O my soul.

(adapted from Psalm 103)

Prayer of the Day

God of justice and peace, we thank you for the men and women throughout history who have served as testaments to your care and love for all people. Give us the strength to continue on this path, following along the way of you Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Reading - Romans 14:1-12

Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters. ²One person's faith allows them to eat anything, but another, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. ³The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted them. ⁴Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall. And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand. ⁵One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind. ⁶Whoever regards one day as special does so to the Lord. Whoever eats meat does so to the Lord, for they give thanks to God; and whoever abstains does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. ⁷For none of us lives for ourselves alone, and none of us dies for ourselves alone. ⁸If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. ⁹For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living. ¹⁰You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. ¹¹It is written:

“‘As surely as I live,’ says the Lord,
‘every knee will bow before me;
every tongue will acknowledge God.’”

¹²So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God.

Sermon - Rev. Justin Thornburgh, Pastor, Emerson Avenue Baptist Church, Indianapolis, IN

WE ARE THE LORD'S

Beloved Friends,

Grace to you and peace in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

As I sit in a local park here in Indianapolis writing these words to you, it is nearing the end of July and less than a week after the passing of Representative John Lewis of Georgia.

For those who don't know or aren't aware, Rep. Lewis began his public life of activism after reading and becoming inspired by a comic book based on the life (up until then) of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Mr. Lewis entered public life and became a leader of SNCC, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. His passion led him to be one of the voices that stepped up to the podium on that August day when Dr. King described his Dream.

Rep. Lewis while leading SNCC, and for a number of years after, would be arrested and beaten in his commitment to the non-violent resistance of oppressive powers. Until his death his commitment was always to those whose lives are lived with their backs against the wall. And the reason I bring all of this up is because what undergirded all of his work, what lit his fire of justice, and what gave him the strength to continue was his unshakable knowledge that we are the Lord's. His commitment to nonviolent resistance was cemented in the fact that we are the Lord's.

His story is what came to mind as I was preparing to write these words to you, and as I reflected on Paul's words to the Romans.

As we read this passage, which comes amid ethical exhortations by the apostle, we are confronted with how we are to respond to others who are part of the body of Christ. We are given a roll call of potential faults followed by possible responses. The apostle is letting us know that this is how we are to respond to our beloved siblings who may have a different way of understanding this thing we call life.

Now, lest this American Baptist pastor cause my friend Pastor Hille's head to explode, I am not proclaiming works righteousness here, quite the contrary, what Paul is doing and what I am echoing here is a way to respond to differences and criticisms having already been, in good old-fashioned Baptist talk, saved. Having accepted the reality of grace, our lives are shaped and changed into something new and thus, our responses to the actions of others

are shaped and changed by the cross shaped love of God. So, these actions are a response to grace not a way to earn grace.

But what happens, then, when we start to see things happening that we know are not right, and yet feel compelled to follow Paul's exhortations? This is the situation I often find myself in, as I come from a prophetic tradition and often find myself at odds with those in power. How do we respond to those who seek death and destruction, and still maintain the higher ground without losing our footing, our grounding, and our rootedness?

This is where Rep. Lewis comes in. As I said above his activism was rooted in the foundational truth espoused by the Apostle, that we are the Lord's. When we—in my tradition, commit to follow Christ and in yours affirm your baptismal vows, we acknowledge what we are dying to (ourselves) and living a new life, a new life that is in the Lord, in the one who created each and every one of us out of stardust and dirt and in their Divine Image. When we commit our lives to walking in the way of Christ, saved by grace, we are committing to a way that acknowledges that yes, we are the Lord's, but in a larger sense that WE ALL are the Lord's.

This is the truth that Rep. Lewis understood and that fueled his fight for civil rights. This is the truth that should ground us when we see the forces of death and destruction shadowing our land. We have the voice to command the powers to fall down, we have the responsibility—the ethical response to this gift called grace - to name these powers and to call them to account; and yet, to do so knowing that no one is beyond the transforming power of God's love.

When we call upon administrations to act justly, to have their hearts broken, we do so, not from a place of judgement but from a place of hope. When we call upon our leaders to act with decency and compassion and mercy we do so knowing that through those acts they might encounter the liberating love of God who will meet them and transform them.

This is how Rep. Lewis, beaten and bloodied, found the courage to face Bull Connor a second time atop the Edmund Pettus bridge in Selma, AL. This is how, Dr. King had the boldness from a Birmingham Jail to call the white moderate Christians to account. They understood that we are the Lord's and when followers of the Way live into their transformed reality, the reality that they are they Lord's, the reality that they are covered by the love of our Lord they can change the world. And they can do it in a way that makes no sense to a world that lives in a constant state of competition and one-up-manship. They can do it in love.

And so, my beloved friends, I want to leave you with this. Rest in the blessed assurance that you are the Lord's. You have been given a gift like none other, do not be afraid to use it, to remind others that they too are the Lord's either by lifting them up when they need carried or calling them to account when they deny the way of love. Proclaim life. Proclaim love. Proclaim grace. For these gifts are ours to share.

God's peace be with you all.

Prayers of Intercession

Open to the gifts of the Holy Spirit, we pray for the church, the world, and all of God's creation.

God of forgiveness, you are full of compassion and mercy. You are slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. Help us to forgive others as you have forgiven us. Empower us to act out mercy, kindness, and love. Lord, in your mercy.

Hear our Prayer.

We give thanks for your love that is unfailing and your mercies that never end. We thank you for all that we celebrate in our lives; for your everlasting promises made in Holy Baptism. Strengthen and sustain us so that we may continue to bear your light to the world. Lord, in your mercy.

Hear our Prayer.

We pray for those who mourn, grant them peace and comfort. Bring healing, courage, and peace for those who are ill, those hospitalized, those facing tests or surgery (especially). Grant your healing presence in our lives. Lord, in your mercy.

Hear our Prayer.

Trusting in your mercy and goodness, we bring before you these prayers and whatever else you see that we need, in the name of the one who sets us free, Jesus Christ, our Savior.

Amen.

Thanksgiving for the Word

We bless you merciful God, for your holy Word that forgives and gives life. In your Word, peace and reconciliation is created and offered for all. For your Word of grace, O God, **we give you thanks and praise!**

Your living Word abounds in steadfast love showing grace and mercy to all generations. Continue to sustain us by your Word of life, O God, **that we may know your forgiveness!**

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In thanks and praise for your Word of mercy and grace, Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray:

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Our Father, who art in heaven,

hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
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and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
forever and ever.

Amen.

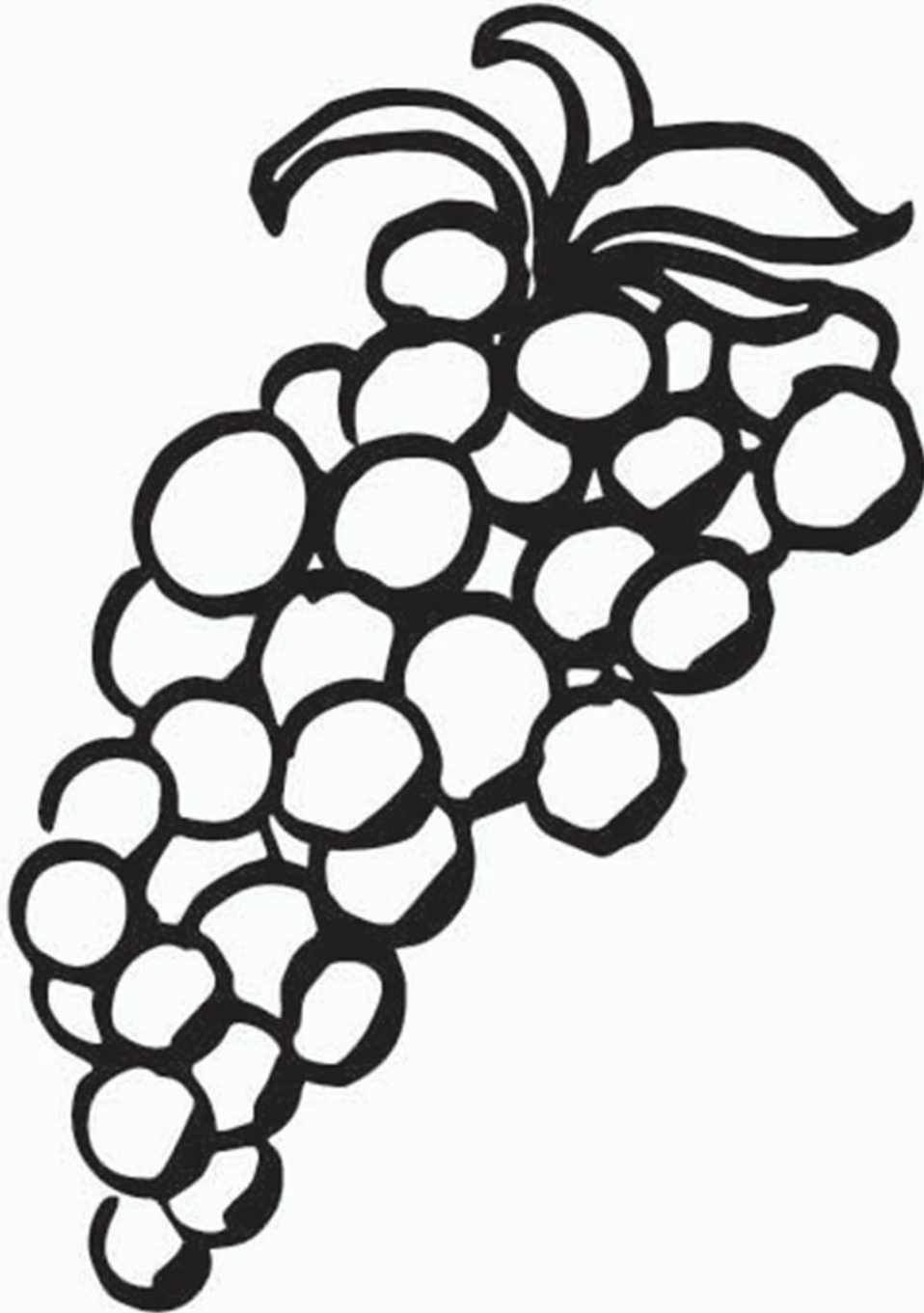
Closing Prayer

As we move from this time of worship, we rejoice O Lord that your peace abides with us. May it give us the patience and resilience to faithfully serve you with acts of love for our brothers and sisters even from our homes.

Amen.

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

September 20, 2020



SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

September 20, 2020

Call To Worship

The LORD is good to all,

I will meditate on God's wonderful works

One generation commends the Lord's works to another

I will meditate on God's wonderful works

Every day I will praise you

I will meditate on God's wonderful works

(adapted from Psalm 145)

Prayer of the Day

Almighty and everlasting God, your grace, mercy, forgiveness, and love are beyond measure. Strengthen us to trust not in what we have, but in the abundance of what you are blessing us with through Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

Gospel - Matthew 20:1-16

"For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. ²He agreed to pay them a denarius^[a] for the day and sent them into his vineyard. ³"About nine in the morning he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. ⁴He told them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.' ⁵So they went. "He went out again about noon and about three in the afternoon and did the same thing. ⁶About five in the afternoon he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, 'Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?' ⁷"'Because no one has hired us,' they answered. "He said to them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard.' ⁸"When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.' ⁹"The workers who were hired about five in the afternoon came and each received a denarius. ¹⁰So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. ¹¹When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. ¹²'These who were hired last worked only one hour,' they said, 'and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.' ¹³"But he answered one of them, 'I am not

being unfair to you, friend. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? ¹⁴Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. ¹⁵Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?' ¹⁶"So the last will be first, and the first will be last."

Sermon - Rev. Daniel W. Hille, Pastor, Faith Lutheran Church, Whitehall, OH

I once saw a cartoon in a newspaper. It was two simple frames. In the left-hand frame there were three children trying to watch a baseball game over a fence. The children were of different heights, one short, one average, and one very tall. All three were standing on boxes that were the exact same height. The result was that the tallest child could clearly see the game, the child of average height could see over the fence with the help of the box, and the shortest child had no hope whatsoever of seeing the game. On the top of the frame was the word- equal.

In the right-hand frame, there were the same three children, the same ball game, and the same fence impeding their views. In this frame the shortest child had two boxes stacked up and finally able to see, the middle child remained standing on one box, and the tallest stood on the ground but was still able to see the game fine. On the top of the frame was the word- fair.

Equality and fairness are not synonyms.

"For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard."

A denarius was a daily wage. So for answering the call, the landowner gave each of the workers a day's wages.

The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who calls any who will listen, and provides what they need to make it through to another day.

So what do they need? How much do they need?

My friend and mentor Ronnie once gave a children's sermon during which he asked the kids an interesting question. "If Jesus were at Taco Bell and he was going to get you a drink, what size fountain drink do you think he would get you?" The children laughed at the idea of Jesus bringing them a soda at Taco Bell, then they begin to guess- Small? Medium? Extra Large?" Ronnie smiled, the congregation chuckled, then he said, "If Jesus were in Taco Bell, he would order *just enough*... because just enough for Jesus is always more than enough us."

The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who calls workers to the field, and promises them just enough to be cared for, so they can come back and be provided for the next day.

The kingdom, as we hear it described so often, is that of God who loves us so much that the Son, Jesus Christ, was sent so that all who believe in him may not perish but have eternal life. How much does God love us? Just enough... which is far more than enough. God's "just

enough" is the abundance we receive. God's "just enough" is more grace, love, and salvation than we can even begin to comprehend.

Is this idea fair? That God loves us all the same amount? I'd be willing to make the argument that my Grandmother doesn't need half as much grace as I do, and I'd like to think (jokingly) that my brother needs more grace than I do.

But God loves us all equally, and that is to say God loves us abundantly, graciously, and unceasingly.

This notion of equality is hard for some to swallow. Shouldn't those who worked longer get paid more? That is what the voices who worked all day were asking. Isn't my time worth more? That is the question that legacy, establishment, and generational entitlement asks. Then again, equality and fairness are not synonyms

God loves us equally. Whether that's fair or not, I thank God that it is true. I am thankful that God loves us exactly as we are, saints & sinners, cradle Christians & those who came to the faith later in life. God loves us equally as children of faith.

So how much does God love us?

Just enough.

Just enough to wash us in the waters of Baptism.

Just enough to feed us with the meal of the Eucharist.

Just enough to send Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior, to die on the cross for us.

God loves us just enough to care for us and provide us an abundance of love, forgiveness, and salvation so that we might come back, and answer the call again tomorrow. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

Open to the gifts of the Holy Spirit, we pray for the church, the world, and all of God's creation.

God of generosity, your grace and mercy has been given to the whole world through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Empower us to be witnesses of your life-giving Gospel. Send us as laborers into the fields of this world to do your work of mercy and justice. Lord, in your mercy.

Hear our Prayer.

God of all creation, your creative power causes the changes of season. We thank you for the summer, the time of growing. We pray that you bless us with an abundant harvest to sustain us through the coming months. Sustain us with your gifts. Lord, in your mercy.

Hear our Prayer.

God of healing, grant your healing presence, courage, and peace for those who are ill, those hospitalized, those facing tests or surgery (especially). Grant your presence to those who mourn. Lord, in your mercy.

Hear our Prayer.

Trusting in your mercy and goodness, we bring before you these prayers and whatever else you see that we need, in the name of the one who sets us free, Jesus Christ, our Savior.

Amen.

Thanksgiving for the Word

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Amen.

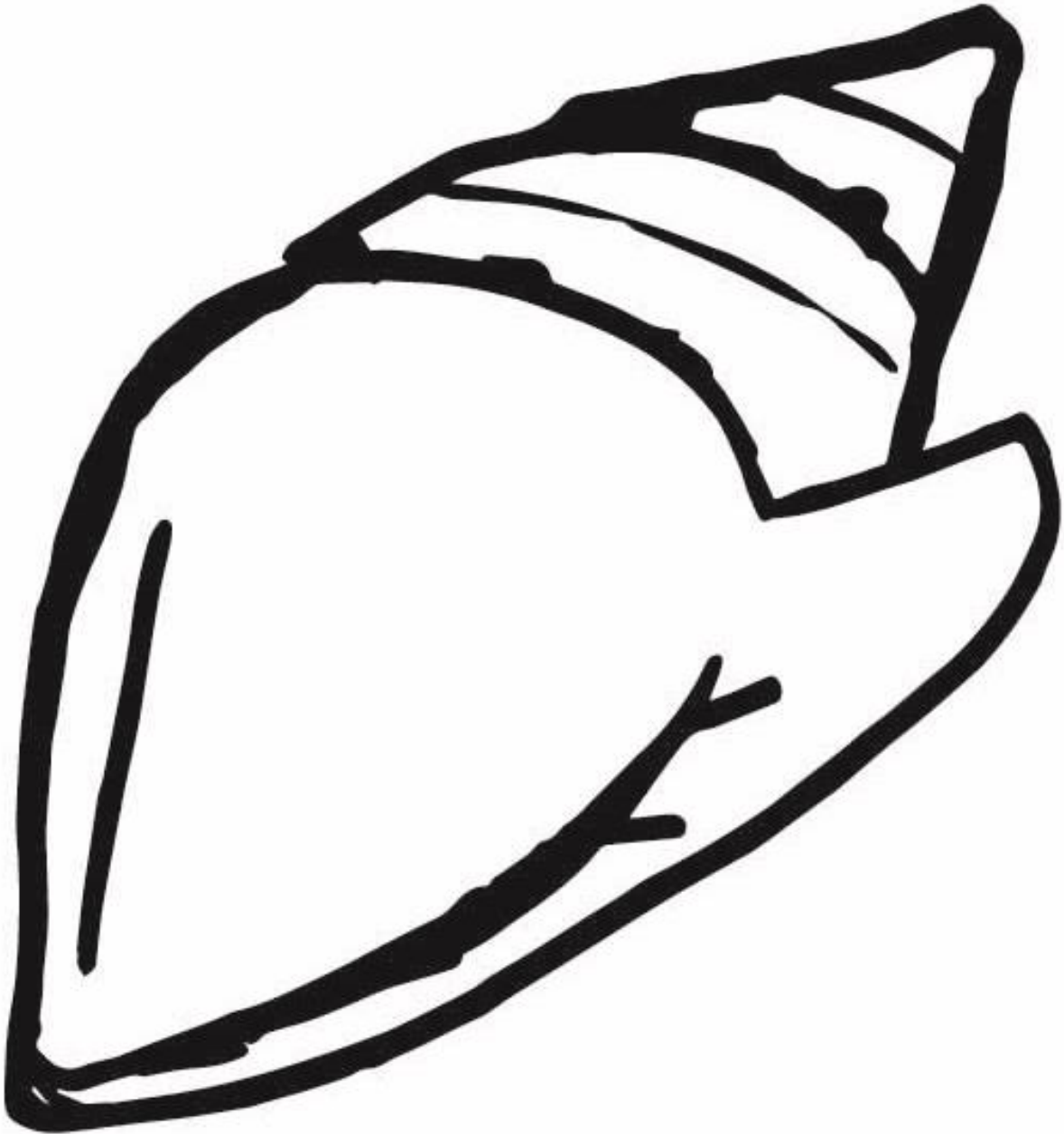
Closing Prayer

As we move from this time of worship, we rejoice O Lord that your peace abides with us. May it give us the patience and resilience to faithfully serve you with acts of love for our brothers and sisters even from our homes.

Amen.

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

September 27, 2020



SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

September 27, 2020

Call To Worship

Do not let me be put to shame,
nor let my enemies triumph over me
In you, LORD my God, I put my trust.

Show me your ways, LORD,
teach me your paths
In you, LORD my God, I put my trust.

Relieve the troubles of my heart
and free me from my anguish
In you, LORD my God, I put my trust.

(adapted from Psalm 25)

Prayer of the Day

Holy God, maker, and redeemer of all.
You love us as your daughters and sons, calling us to follow you in both word and deed.
and loving us when we get both wrong. Remind us of your faithfulness and empower us with
your Spirit as we seek to be outposts of your kingdom here on Earth.
Amen.

Gospel - Matthew 21:23-32

²³ Jesus entered the temple courts, and, while he was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him. "By what authority are you doing these things?" they asked. "And who gave you this authority?" ²⁴ Jesus replied, "I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. ²⁵ John's baptism—where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or of human origin?" They discussed it among themselves and said, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask, 'Then why didn't you believe him?'" ²⁶ But if we say, 'Of human origin'—we are afraid of the people, for they all hold that John was a prophet." ²⁷ So they answered Jesus, "We don't know." Then he said, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things. ²⁸ "What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work today in the vineyard.' ²⁹ "'I will not,' he answered, but later he changed his mind and went. ³⁰ "Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, 'I will, sir,' but he did not go. ³¹ "Which of the two did what his father wanted?" "The first," they answered. Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God

ahead of you. ³²For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.

Sermon - Rev. Jocelyn Johnston, Interim Pastor, St. John Lutheran Church, North Versailles, PA

Rachel Held Evans was a theologian and best-selling author who was tragically taken from this world too soon, last year at the age of 37. I have been grateful for her teaching in my life and was particularly moved by a story she tells in one of her books. Rachel had lived most of her life as a good Christian, or so she thought, until she had a crisis of faith as a young adult. On her journey, as she discovered what it means to really follow Jesus, she had a spiritual awakening on a trip to India. Because I also took a trip to India many years ago, I think I especially connected with this story. This is what she says about that trip...

"James, the brother of Jesus, once said that true religion is caring for orphans and widows, so I guess I shouldn't have been surprised when my first religious experience in India happened in the company of widows and orphans. About thirty of us were packed into a fifteen-passenger van, windows down, speeding down the streets of Hyderabad on our way to a church in the city. The kids, ranging in age from five to fifteen, were dressed in their Sunday best and were piled on top of one another, singing as loudly as possible and with no inhibition songs about Jesus in English and Telugu. My eardrums rang. My stomach lurched with every sudden swerve of the van. My lungs ached from inhaling pollution, and my head pounded from the heat. But I hadn't felt that close to Jesus in years. I felt certain that he was crammed in there with us, singing along.

In India, I was introduced to the kingdom of heaven – not as it exists in some future state but as it exists in the here and now, where the hungry are fed with both physical and spiritual bread, where the sick are saved from both their diseases and their sins, where an illiterate widow taught me more about faith than any theologian ever could, and where children from the slums sing with God. In India, I learned that the gospel is still special. Jesus still matters and can make a difference in people's lives."

We bring the kingdom of God to this world when we follow Jesus in not only our words, but in our actions as well. You know that phrase "do as I say, not as I do"? It's often used when kids catch their parents doing the very things they've been told not to do. This phrase implies that our words mean more than our actions. But I think today's message from Scripture challenges that theory.

Jesus' parable spoken to that specific audience implies a way to compare the two "sons" with those around him: the tax-collectors and prostitutes, on the one hand, and the chief priests and elders, on the other hand. Those most expected to understand and do God's will -- the religious leadership -- fail to appreciate God's working in and through John the Baptist and Jesus, while those least expected to understand and do God's will -- the ones most culturally despised by the rest -- acknowledge God's work in John's baptism and message and follow Christ.

Jesus considered both groups of people God's children. But in the parable, the sons' actions, not their words, determined which was obedient or true, that is, the one most willing to

participate in the father's business. In the allegory, Jesus equated involvement in the father's vineyard with recognition of John's baptism as a sign of God's authority. And to do God's will was to be and act in close association with Jesus.

The parable sets up a comparison of two sons. One who says he will do what his father asks, but doesn't, with one who says he won't, but does. There is an accusation in the parable, particularly for the audience to which Jesus is speaking -- some who claim to obey the Father and observe the requirements of the Law fail to actually do so. Is this who we are, as believers -- as pastors, teachers, leaders, and members of the Church? Do we pretend to be obedient, or do we actually *act* obediently? Our thoughts and words are important. How we express and confess our faith is important. But God's Word today tells us that faith doesn't just mean thinking a certain way. Faith in Christ implies action. It means speaking *and* acting boldly by the authority of Christ.

In telling about her trip to India, Rachel Held Evans illustrates the message we receive today from the Word of God. She says, "This radical Jesus wanted to live not only in my heart and in my head but also in my hands, as I fed the hungry, reached out to my enemies, healed the sick, and comforted the lonely. Being a Christian, it seemed, isn't about agreeing to a certain way; it is about embodying a certain way. It is about living as an incarnation of Jesus, as Jesus lived as an incarnation of God."

Here's the real trick: ultimately neither son in the parable is perfect. One says the right thing but does not do the right thing. The other does not say the right thing but does the right thing. They both get it wrong. Similarly, we are far from perfect. Sometimes we say the right things, sometimes we don't. Sometimes we do the right things, other times we don't. We all get it wrong from time to time, maybe even more often than not. We are all in need of God's love and grace to save us from ourselves. This Scripture passage, more than anything else I think, is about recognizing Jesus' authority, and with that, God's authority, above all else.

The letter from Paul to the Philippians calls us to remember that we are a community in Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, and called to hold the interests of others and the will of God higher than our own interests. This may seem like a difficult task. But this Scripture text also reminds us that God is at work in us. The Spirit of God enables us to gather food for the hungry, comfort the sick or grieving, advocate for the vulnerable, show kindness to our enemies, forgive those who hurt us, and love and be loved. God empowers us to be the living incarnation of Jesus Christ in this world and to bring the kingdom of heaven to earth. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

Open to the gifts of the Holy Spirit, we pray for the church, the world, and all of God's creation.

Gracious God, we give thanks to you, because you are good. Your mercy and love endure forever. Empower us to be beacons of your love, extensions of your mercy, and stewards of your justice in our world. Lord in your mercy,

Hear our prayer.

God of all peoples, You rejoice in the people and places of the world. We pray for nations who cannot sit at table together, for leaders distracted by anxiety and fear, and for refugees unwelcome in their homelands. We pray for those who lead our nation, state, and community. Grant them patience, understanding, and wisdom. Lord in your mercy,

Hear our prayer.

We pray for the lonely, the disheartened, those who suffer from debilitating illness, those who cannot speak for themselves, and those in any need, (especially). Grant your healing presence in our lives.. Lord in your mercy,

Hear our prayer.

Trusting in your mercy and goodness, we bring before you these prayers and whatever else you see that we need, in the name of the one who sets us free, Jesus Christ, our Savior.

Amen.

Thanksgiving for the Word

We bless you merciful God, for your holy Word that forgives and gives life. In your Word, peace and reconciliation is created and offered for all. For your Word of grace, O God, **we give you thanks and praise!**

Your living Word abounds in steadfast love showing grace and mercy to all generations. Continue to sustain us by your Word of life, O God, **that we may know your forgiveness!**

Jesus is your humble word, caring for the neighbor to share the life of God. Through your Word of Jesus, O God, **inspire us to humbly care for the needs of the world!**

In thanks and praise for your Word of mercy and grace, Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray:

Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,

and the power, and the glory,
forever and ever.

Amen.

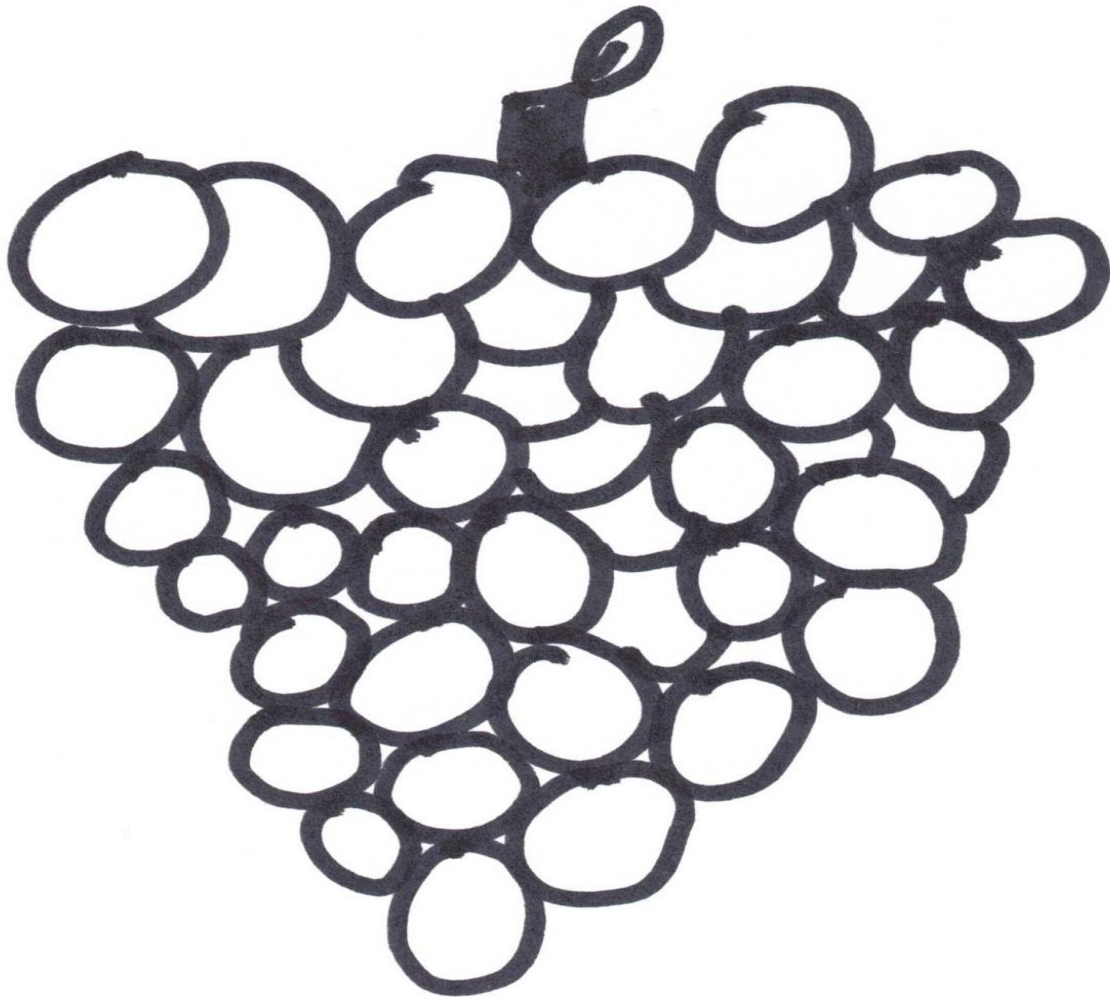
Closing Prayer

As we move from this time of worship, we rejoice O Lord that your peace abides with us. May it give us the patience and resilience to faithfully serve you with acts of love for our brothers and sisters even from our homes.

Amen.

EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

October 4, 2020



EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

October 4, 2020

Call To Worship

Restore us, God Almighty;
make your face shine on us,
that we may be saved.

Awaken your might; come and save us.

Watch over this vine,
the root your right hand has planted,
the son you have raised up for yourself.

Awaken your might; come and save us.

Let your hand rest on the man at your right hand,
the son of man you have raised up for yourself.

Awaken your might; come and save us.

(adapted from Psalm 80)

Prayer of the Day

Beloved and sovereign God, through the life, death, and resurrection of your Son, Jesus Christ you proclaimed you loved for all creation. Open our heart, minds, and ears to your love and care for us. Saturate us with your mercy, kindness, and grace that our faith may grow, and your message extend to all the corners of the world both now and forever.

Amen.

Gospel - Matthew 21:33-46

³³ "Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and moved to another place. ³⁴ When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit. ³⁵ "The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. ³⁶ Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. ³⁷ Last of all, he sent his son to them. 'They will respect my son,' he said. ³⁸ "But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and take his inheritance.' ³⁹ So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. ⁴⁰ "Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes,

what will he do to those tenants?" ⁴¹ "He will bring those wretches to a wretched end," they replied, "and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time." ⁴² Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures:

"The stone the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone;
the Lord has done this,
and it is marvelous in our eyes' [a]?"

⁴³ "Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. ⁴⁴ Anyone who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed." [b] ⁴⁵ When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus' parables, they knew he was talking about them. ⁴⁶ They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet.

Sermon - Rev. Paul Offhaus, Pastor, St. John Evangelical Church, Fort Wayne, IN

Has anyone seen the movie, "V Is for Vendetta"? It's a powerful movie on many levels, one of which is the idea of how far one might go in protesting an unjust government. Is protesting enough? What about violence? What about advocating and even actively working toward overthrowing an unjust government? The movie's main character, named simply 'V', forces such questions on the mind of the young female lead, named—in linguistic tension with V—Evie. As one might expect, V loves the letter 'V'. Here, for instance, is a portion of his introduction to Evie:

"The only verdict is vengeance; a vendetta, held as a votive not in vain, for the value and veracity of such shall one day vindicate the vigilant and the virtuous." For those keeping score at home, that's ten out of thirty 'V' words in just one sentence. Impressive, right?

One reason I mention "V for Vendetta" now is the whole 'V' thing. We find in today's Gospel text a whole lot of Vs as well - a veritable V Fest. Vineyards, Victims and Victors, yes, but verily, verily I say to you, there's a variety of others, as well—a virtual smorgasbord, really. We also find the same idea of violent opposition to established order. Let's consider the Vs of Matthew 21 together this day. But first, let us pray.

Lord God, may the words of my mouth, the meditations of our hearts and the applications of our lives be acceptable in your sight, O God, our rock and our redeemer, in whom we place our trust. Amen.

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

The very first 'V' we encounter in Jesus' parable is a **vineyard**:

"There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a watchtower. Then he leased it to tenants and went to another country." (Matthew 21:33)

When we encounter stories such as this in the Bible, whether it be Matthew 21, today's Psalm or the Isaiah 5 reading, the vineyard—or in the case of the Psalm, the vine—indicates something that belongs to the Lord God. It also represents a fertile place, where one might rightly expect a produce, a bountiful harvest. In Isaiah 5, the vineyard represents the Israelites, God's chosen people. In Jesus' telling of the parable, the vineyard represents the Israelites, but Jesus also introduces the tenants into the story. These are the chief priests and the Pharisees, the ones who were in charge of the vineyard while the landowner was away. As the religious leaders, they are the guardians of the Temple. But it was also their responsibility to care for the Israelites—the vineyard—and do all they could to ensure a good harvest.

Then there are the **victims**, beginning with the landowner's slaves – one of whom was beaten, another killed, and a third stoned—not to mention "other slaves" who were treated in much the same way. This suggests many attempts on the landowner's part to collect his rightful produce from his tenants. In the parable, the landowner's slaves represent God's prophets, sent one by one to remind God's people of their calling to be God's vineyard, that is, to produce fruits in the world—fruits of justice and love, righteousness and peace for all the world to see.

But it doesn't work. Their pleas fall on deaf ears, as the tenants turn them away in varying degrees of harshness, just as so many of God's prophets were resisted by God's people over the centuries. What else could the landowner do? "Finally," Jesus says, the landowner "sent his son" (Mt 21:37). Surely they will respect his own son!

And this is of course exactly what God in Christ has done. As we hear in John's Gospel, in arguably the Bible's most famous verse, John 3:16:

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."

Verse 17, though lesser known, continues the theme:

"Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."

In word and deed, Jesus, God's only Son, proclaimed the Kingdom of God, a kingdom of justice and love, righteousness and peace, for all the world to see. And he invited all people, including the religious leaders, to come together in bringing that kingdom into reality.

But like the prophets before him, Jesus' message was resisted. In the parable, Jesus describes the tenants' treatment of the son this way:

"They seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him."

Ring any bells?

The religious leaders of Jesus' day were the primary people behind Jesus' arrest, sham of a trial, whipping, beating, mockery and crucifixion. And where did Jesus' crucifixion take place? Outside the city, just as the son was thrown outside the vineyard before he was killed.

Jesus knew what was coming. Jesus knew who would do it and where it would happen. And yet notice what comes next as Jesus wraps up his parable he tells the chief priests and the Pharisees.

Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?"

This is the 'aha' moment of the parable, the moment when the parable turns, where it startles its hearers and challenges their preconceived notions about life and faith and God. Each parable Jesus tells has such a moment, when the story turns. In the Parable of the Good Samaritan, it's when the person who cares for the man by the side of the road turns out to be a hated Samaritan, rather than an everyday Jewish Joseph. In the Parable of the Prodigal Son, it's when the father *runs* to meet his son as he is making his way back home, completely disregarding all the dignity that would befit his status as the patriarch of the family.

The 'aha' moment here is Jesus asking *the very people he is telling the parable against*, the chief priests and Pharisees, what *they* think the vineyard owner will do to the tenants?

⁴¹ They said to him, "He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time."

Their response reminds me of another parable Jesus tells, the Parable of the Talents, which appears just a few chapters later in Matthew's Gospel. In it, the one who had received one talent replies to his Master:

'Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' (Matthew 25:24-25)

The slave 'knew' what sort of person the master was . . . or did he? The master's response suggests perhaps the slave was not as knowledgeable of his master's character as he thought:

But his master replied, 'You wicked and lazy slave! **You knew, did you**, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. (Matthew 25:26-28, emphasis mine)

Notice the master doesn't confirm the slave's assessment of him. He simply says, "You knew, did you?" I think something similar is going on here. The chief priests and the Pharisees tell Jesus what *they* would do if *they* were in the landlord's shoes—put the tenants to a miserable death and bring in a whole new crop of tenants to care for the vineyard. Then Jesus, following his own teaching ("For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get" [Matthew 7:2b]), confirms that their judgment of themselves will indeed stand:

⁴³ "Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be *taken* away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom."

This is precisely what happened in 70 AD, when the Romans marched on Jerusalem in response to a Jewish revolt and destroyed the Temple that the chief priests and the Pharisees oversaw. The violence (another 'V') of the tenants is met with the violence of the master.

The Temple was where God had declared to his people that he would dwell on earth. In both the Temple's destruction and in the tearing of the curtain of the Temple at the moment of Jesus' death (Matthew 27:51), we see God's presence departing the Temple. At the same time, in the giving of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-5), we see God's presence given to the Church instead. *The kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom.*

But before we as the Church today get too excited, let us remember that the sword cuts both ways. Just as the Kingdom of God and its stewardship was taken from the

chief priests and the Pharisees for a lack of fruitfulness, a similar challenge and warning exists for the Church:

Matthew 3:8 (NRSV) — ⁸ Bear fruit worthy of repentance.

Matthew 7:19 (NRSV) — ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

John 15:1–2, 4–6 (NRSV) — ¹ “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. ² He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. ⁴ Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.

Take care, Church! Bear the fruits of the kingdom of God—a kingdom of justice and love, righteousness and peace, for all the world to see. Speak up for those who have no voice. Defend the widow, the orphan and the alien in your midst. In other words, do what Jesus would do and say if he were in your shoes.

But what if we don't? What if we fail in God's mission for us to make disciples of the Kingdom of God?

Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?"

Here we are back again at the 'aha' moment of the parable. At first glance, it appears to be yet another 'V' word: **Vindication**. That is, the landowner is vindicated in the 'miserable death' of his cruel tenants – 'wretches' is what they unwittingly call themselves.

But because it is the chief priests and Pharisees who answer the question and not Jesus himself, *another* question hangs in the air:

“Is it *really* the character of the landowner to be vindictive?"

Maybe not. I mean, if vindication really was the landowner's endgame, why not send soldiers instead of his son, once slave after slave after slave is abused or even killed? Let's let David Lose pick up the story from here:

“So where does the bright idea come from to send his son, his heir, alone, to treat with these bloodthirsty hooligans? It's absolutely crazy. Who would do such a thing? No one . . . except maybe a crazy landlord so desperate to be in *relationship* with these tenants that he will do anything, risk anything, to reach out of them. This landowner acts more like a desperate parent, willing to do or say or try anything to reach out to a beloved and wayward child than he does a businessman. It's crazy, the kind of crazy that comes from being in love.”

“For God so **loved** the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” (John 3:16-17)

See what **love** the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. (1 John 3:1)

Thanks be to God for this Crazy Love, this love that will not let us – or the world God loves so much – go. This love that would not let that Son who suffered such a cruel and shameful death stay dead very long. Indeed, thanks be to God for Christ crucified yet resurrected—**Victorious**, if you will (our final ‘V’)—for the LIFE of the world. Amen? Amen!

Prayers of Intercession

As members of the Body of Christ, gathered here and across the world, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need.

Gracious and patient God, you call us to be good stewards of your vineyard nurturing and working for peace and justice. Empower us to bear fruit that will feed the world with your love and grace. Lord in your mercy,

Hear our Prayer.

God of all nations, raise up leaders well equipped to foster peace and healing for all people. We pray for those who are seeking employment or lacking meaningful work, and for those who are searching for new opportunities for their vocation. Empower those in leadership and management positions to work for the well being of all people created in your image.

Lord in your mercy,

Hear our Prayer.

God of healing and peace, we remember before you all wrestle with pain, suffering, disease, anxiety and stress. Remind them of your nearness and guide the hands, minds and

gifts of those who are in vocations of caretaking, healing, research and medicine. We lay before you all those who desire an extra measure of your grace and those close to our hearts. Lord in your mercy,

Hear our Prayer.

Gracious Spirit, intercede for us with sighs too deep for words; keep us in true faith; and gather us with the whole church on earth, into the communion of the triune God.

Amen.

Thanksgiving for the Word

We bless you, generous God, for your holy Word that welcomes all to yourself. Your Word crosses every boundary and barrier to proclaim your abundant life. For your Word of new life, O God, **we give you thanks and praise!**

Your timeless Word has formed and reformed your Church throughout the ages. As we celebrate this good news, continue to set us free by your Word, O God, **that we might always be reformed to live out your love through our lives!**

Jesus is your Word into which we are welcomed in baptism to bear the fruit of your love. Through your Word of Jesus, O God, **send us to welcome others and form the world by your love!**

In thanks and praise for your reforming Word to change the world, Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray:

Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
forever and ever.

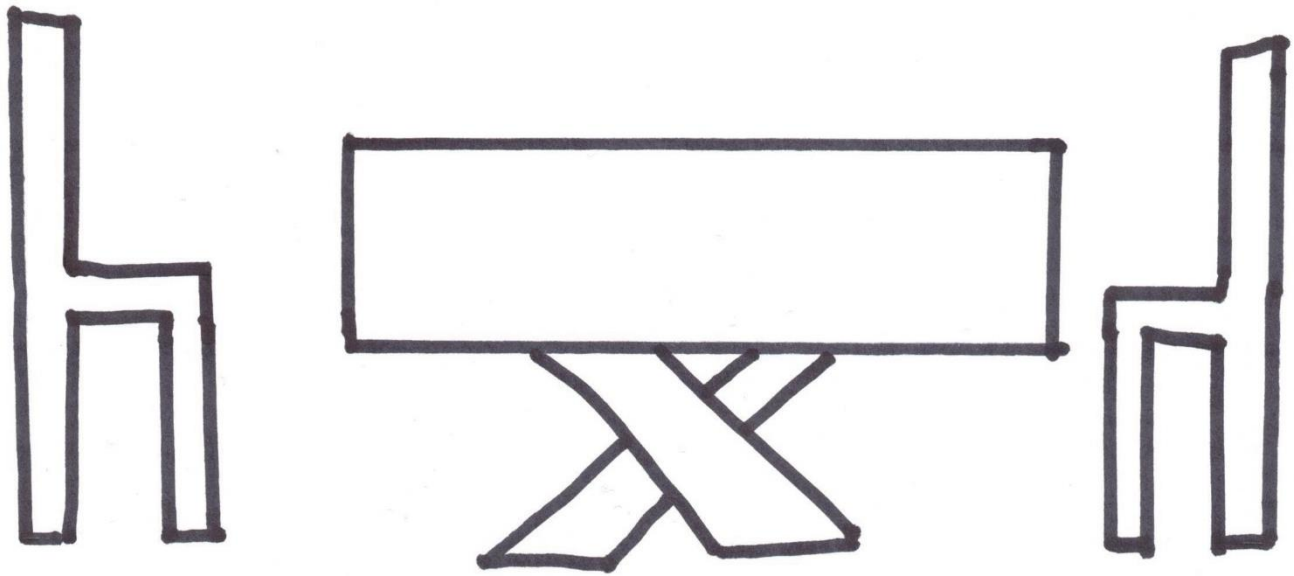
Amen.

Closing Prayer

As we move from this time of worship, we rejoice O Lord that your peace abides with us. May it give us the patience and resilience to faithfully serve you with acts of love for our brothers and sisters even from our homes. **Amen.**

NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

October 11 , 2020



NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

October 11 , 2020

Call To Worship

The Lord is my shepherd,
I shall not be in want

You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
I shall not be in want

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life
I shall not be in want

(adapted from Psalm 23)

Prayer of the Day

Holy God and gracious king, you invite all to your banquet. Help us to put on the robe of your faithfulness, grace, and love, living into our baptismal covenant by the power of your son Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.
Amen.

Gospel - Matthew 22:1-14

Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: ² “The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. ³ He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come. ⁴ “Then he sent some more servants and said, ‘Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.’ ⁵ “But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business. ⁶ The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. ⁷ The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. ⁸ “Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. ⁹ So go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.’ ¹⁰ So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, the bad as well as the good, and the wedding hall was filled with guests. ¹¹ “But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. ¹² He asked, ‘How did you get in here without wedding clothes, friend?’ The man was speechless. ¹³ “Then the king told the attendants, ‘Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the

darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' ¹⁴ "For many are invited, but few are chosen."

Sermon - Rev. Kjersten Sullivan, Pastor, Trinity Lutheran Church, Battle Creek, MI

Not going to lie, my first read through of this one I thought, geez, I drew the short straw on this text! Last week's was a bit of a doozy as well. But at least last week's parable didn't end with Matthew's trademark "weeping and gnashing of teeth." Fun fact: If you're ever trying to guess which Gospel a verse came from, if the verse involves "weeping and gnashing of teeth," it's Matthew.

But traditionally Matthean or not, it's a tough phrase to deal with. Especially as Lutherans, we, well I can't speak for all of you but I, struggle with the judgmental God this parable seems to portray. It may have something to do with how much I dislike shopping, but I'm not always sure what to make of a Jesus who is so particular about clothing.

But Pastor Nadia Bolz Weber talks about how we tend to read parables as prescriptive, if this then that. But parables are more often descriptive, they describe the kingdom of heaven. So what if this parable isn't about how Jesus is judging your outfit? What Jesus was just telling us how things are?

This parable is the last in a series of parables Jesus told in response to the Pharisees questioning his authority to teach in the temple. This one, last week's parable on the wicked tenants, and the one the week before about the two sons, are all meant to build on each other. Jesus told them to the Pharisees after he asked them what they thought about John the Baptist and they refused to take a side. So, when we hear this parable, we have to resist the habit we'd developed over the summer of putting on our disciple hat to hear it, instead we have to put on our Pharisee hat. This parable is meant to challenge the parts of us who are insiders, who gain power from our association with Christianity, and who use that power to exclude others.

Dr. Eugene Boring pointed out that Jesus compared the kingdom of heaven not to the king, but to the situation of the king who threw a wedding banquet to which no one came.ⁱ He kept sending slaves to bring in the guests, but still they refused. And not only did they refuse, but they killed the messengers. Eventually the king got fed up, sent his troops out, and destroyed the cities. So, what's the message here? If the parable is prescriptive, the message seems pretty clear. You better come to the party God is throwing, or God will destroy your city. But what if the parable is not prescriptive? What if, as Pastor Bolz Weber thinks, it is descriptive? After all, what is the Old Testament but a story in which Israel turns away from God, God sends a prophet to call them back, they ignore and/or kill the prophet, and then they get conquered. But even as the prophet is warning them of the danger, the prophet also promises God's presence with them, and even after they are conquered, the prophet promises God is still with them, and eventually, God leads them back from slavery to

freedom. And then the story repeats itself. Like last week's parable, we once again have two sets of slaves who are allegories of the prophets.

I want to be a little careful here, because I'm not saying that God destroyed the people because they didn't listen to the prophets. It's like the story of the man sitting on his roof as the flood waters rose and every time someone offered to help him out, he said, no, God's going to save me. Eventually he drown, and when he went to heaven he asked God, why didn't you save me. To which God replied, I tried. Who do you think all those people offering to help were? The history of redemption following the destruction doesn't line up to be a sign of God's wrath. But if this parable is descriptive, it is a pretty good summary of the events of the Old Testament.

Then the parable goes on. Because the king still had the problem of not having any guests for his party. So he sent his slaves back out to gather up anyone they could find. And soon the hall was filled with guests, both the good and the bad. But when the king entered the hall, he found a guest who was not wearing a wedding robe. And the king was so enraged by the guest's failure to live up to the dress code, that he had his attendants bind the man and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Let's pause here to notice a few things. First, when a king threw a banquet, he often provided wedding robes for his guests. Part of the purpose of such a banquet was for the groom to prove how wealthy and powerful he was. And what better way to show wealth than to literally dress all your guests. So, while an extreme response, it was not unreasonable for the king to expect the guests to be wearing the clothes he gave to them when they entered.

But second, and more important, in the early church, "putting on the robe" was a metaphor for becoming a follower of Jesus. It was a reference to the white robe that new converts would put on after their baptism. This man's refusal to "put on the robe" at the banquet of the kingdom of heaven was not about God having a strict dress code. Rather it was about those who want all the benefits without having to pay any of the costs.

Because there is, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer famously said, a cost to discipleship. There is not a cost to salvation. Salvation is free. It is a gift we receive from Christ by grace, there's nothing we have to do to receive it and nothing we possible could do to earn it. But when we take that gift, it changes us. We become new people, and that change can be costly. The prophets of Israel paid the cost. Bonhoeffer paid it at the hands of the Nazis, Martin Luther King paid it in Memphis, and in maybe less dramatic ways, we pay it too. Being a disciple of Christ is life-giving, but it is not without cost. The promise is not that we will never suffer, but that our suffering is always followed by life.

And maybe this is my snarky millennial side coming out, but I got to thinking about the state of American Christianity. In mainline churches, it sometimes feels like we are pining for an earlier era. When churches were the social gathering space, when the pews were packed, and confirmation classes were huge. Now bear with me. Many of you got your grounding in faith in that environment, and it is a ground that has stood you well long into the future. Who we are is built on the faith poured into you in that period. But it is also the case that the time

we remember was a weird anomaly in church participation. We remember it as being “the way things always were,” because human memory only lasts back a couple of generations at best. It wasn’t the way things always were before that. In the 60s, Trinity, the congregation I serve, was worshipping three hundred on a Sunday. This is the attendance we remember, and the attendance our building was constructed around. But in the early 1900s, the congregation that was founded by forty-two charter members was down to eight. The forty-odd average worship attendance we have in 2020 is not the smallest we’ve ever been, we just don’t have anyone around who remembers when Trinity called a pastor to serve eight of us.

This is not unique to Trinity either, it may also be the story of your congregation. This is basically the story of almost every mainline congregation in America. In the fifties and sixties, church membership grew exponentially. And sociologists posit communism was the cause of that growth. During the Cold War, when Joseph McCarthy was making a name for himself by accusing anyone and everyone of being a spy for the Russians, Americans, and especially high ranking Americans, flocked to churches to prove loyalty to America and distance from the atheist Communists. This is also when “In God We Trust” started showing up on our money, and when the phrase “under God” entered the pledge of allegiance. Before then, such phrases would have provoked memories of the state churches from which the colonists had originally fled. But in the fifties, Russia replaced the Church of England as the greatest threat to democracy, and our society responded accordingly.

And for many people, it worked. Many of you are a testament to the great faith formation a culture of churchgoers can produce. But it didn’t work for everyone. My generation’s lack of church connection can also be traced back to a time when church was mostly about making sure you were seen in the right social circles, to get the right promotions and have the right credentials. Like the parable demonstrated, when you invite everyone to the party, some people show up just for the food.

And I am beginning to believe that this pendulum swing is actually good news for us. While it is tempting to look back at the past and lament, I think this parable should help us look forward with joy to the new future God is calling us into. Because the people who were only coming to the party to gain power, aren’t coming anymore. That was Jesus’ challenge to the Pharisees, if you’re only coming to eat the free food, you’re taking up a space at the table. Come and be changed.

And if we look at back at the church’s history, we notice a startling trend, and that is that we as the church are not at our best when we are the center of society. Constantine’s Rome, not our best moment. The Crusades, not our best moment. The medieval church, not our best moment. We as the church do our best work from the margins. The early Church under Roman persecution was known for its care for widows, orphans, and the marginalized. Luther was an upstart monk from rural Germany who argued God’s grace was not reserved for those who could afford it. Bonhoeffer’s underground church challenged Hitler and helped Jews escape to safety. The black church under Jim Crow fueled the Civil Rights Movement. We do our best work when we do it from the edges. And maybe, just maybe, that’s what’s happening now. A bishop once said to me maybe it’s not that the church is dying but that, like a boxer before a fight, it’s cutting excess weight and getting ready to move.

So put on your robes, dear people of God. Don the robe of Christ and enter into the work. Many are called, but few are chosen, and we know from the promises made in our baptism that we have been chosen. We stand at the edge of a new Reformation, and I cannot wait to see how God, through us, is going to change the world. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

As members of the Body of Christ, gathered here and across the world, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need.

Gracious host, empower your church with a commitment to welcome and hospitality. We pray for bishops, pastors, deacons, teachers, lay leaders, and all the baptized as they invite others to your table of forgiveness, reconciliation, and grace. Lord in your mercy,

Hear our Prayer.

Lord of east and west, north and south, there are no boundaries to your transforming love. Help and equip diplomats, mayors, governors, and all elected officials to set a table for peace. Open clear lines of communication and understanding so that justice and relief for the oppressed and marginalized prevails. Lord in your mercy,

Hear our Prayer.

God of healing, bring your grace and comfort to all who are tired or ill. Especially all those we hold close in our hearts who hunger for a special measure of your grace. Strengthen and equip doctors, nurses, first responders, and caretakers with the resources they need to bring lasting healing for all in need. Lord in your mercy,

Hear our Prayer.

Gracious Spirit, intercede for us with sighs too deep for words; keep us in true faith; and gather us with the whole church on earth, into the communion of the triune God.

Amen.

Thanksgiving for the Word

We bless you, generous God, for your holy Word that welcomes all to yourself. Your Word crosses every boundary and barrier to proclaim your abundant life. For your Word of new life, O God, **we give you thanks and praise!**

Your timeless Word has formed and reformed your Church throughout the ages. As we celebrate this good news, continue to set us free by your Word, O God, **that we might always be reformed to live out your love through our lives!**

Jesus is your Word into which we are welcomed in baptism to bear the fruit of your love. Through your Word of Jesus, O God, **send us to welcome others and form the world by your love!**

In thanks and praise for your reforming Word to change the world, Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray:

Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
forever and ever.

Amen.

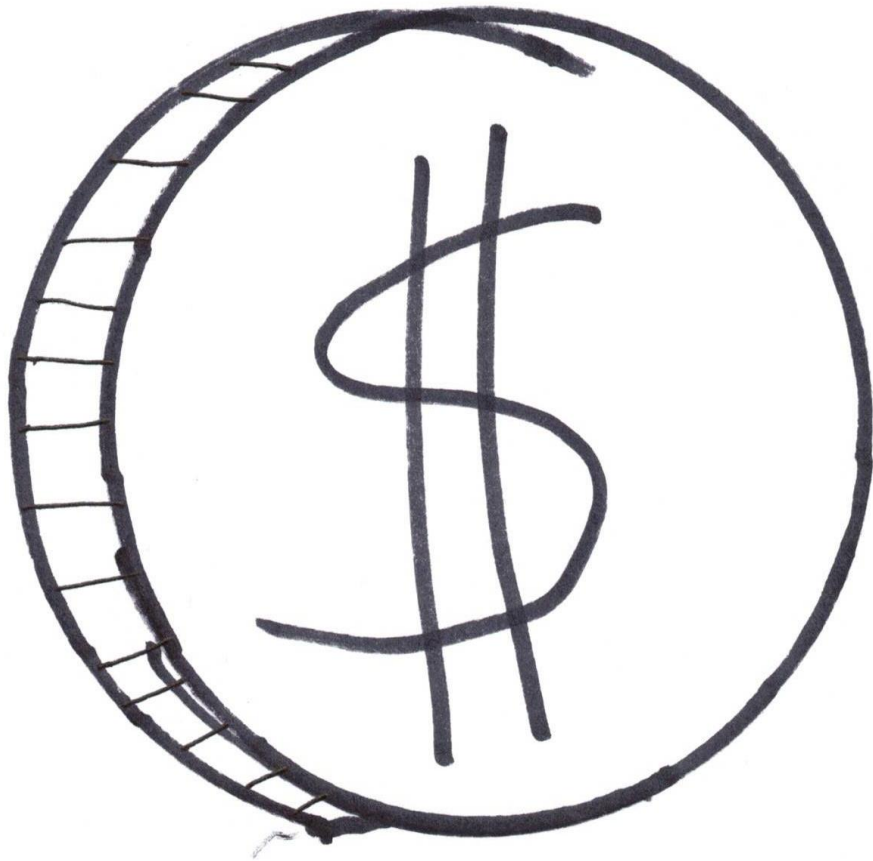
Closing Prayer

As we move from this time of worship, we rejoice O Lord that your peace abides with us. May it give us the patience and resilience to faithfully serve you with acts of love for our brothers and sisters even from our homes.

Amen.

TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

October 11, 2020



TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

October 18 , 2020

Call To Worship

Worship the LORD in holy splendor
tell of his salvation from day to day.

Sing to the LORD, bless his name
tell of his salvation from day to day.

Say among the nations, "The LORD is king!
The world is firmly established; it shall never be moved.
tell of his salvation from day to day.

(adapted from Psalm 96)

Prayer of the Day

God of all time and space, you created the light and the dark, taking joy in both of your creations. Give us the strength to trust your love for us, that we may accept your love for our whole selves, especially the parts of selves that we seek to hide from the world. Through your Son help us to see ourselves as people wholly loved by you and the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever.

Amen.

Reading - Isaiah 45:1-7

"This is what the LORD says to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of to subdue nations before him and to strip kings of their armor to open doors before him so that gates will not be shut:

²I will go before you and will level the mountains^[a]; I will break down gates of bronze and cut through bars of iron.

³I will give you hidden treasures, riches stored in secret places, so that you may know that I am the LORD, the God of Israel, who summons you by name.

⁴For the sake of Jacob my servant, of Israel my chosen, I summon you by name and bestow

on you a title of honor, though you do not acknowledge me.

⁵I am the LORD, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God I will strengthen you, though you have not acknowledged me,

⁶so that from the rising of the sun to the place of its setting people may know there is none besides me. I am the LORD, and there is no other.

⁷I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the LORD, do all these things.

Gospel - Matthew 22:15-22

¹⁵Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words. ¹⁶They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. "Teacher," they said, "we know that you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren't swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are. ¹⁷Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay the imperial tax^[a] to Caesar or not?" ¹⁸But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, "You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? ¹⁹Show me the coin used for paying the tax." They brought him a denarius, ²⁰and he asked them, "Whose image is this? And whose inscription?" ²¹"Caesar's," they replied. Then he said to them, "So give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's." ²²When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left him and went away.

Sermon - Rev. Carolyn Albert Donovan, Pastor, Peace Lutheran Church, Austin, TX

"Treasurers of darkness"... "riches hidden in secret"...

I admit that these words from Isaiah have not been part of my Biblical language vocabulary for very long. They escaped my awareness for many years.

This phrase was first lifted out of Scripture for me...and offered as the gift that it is...by my siblings in faith who know the beauty of darkness better than I do. I am not fluent in the language of darkness as beauty. I am fully formed by a world where the heroes wear white and the villains wear black. And things go bump in the night. And the light at the tunnel is always a sign of hope...and never, in fact, an oncoming train.

Except that sometimes the light actually is a harbinger of a collision. Sometimes it pierces. Sometimes it hurts.

I know. And yet, I forget. Even as one who is visually impaired...who knows how harsh light can be on delicate retinas...who knows how much richness I have found, personally, in perception that lies somewhere beyond sight.

Darkness is full of treasure. And sometimes what is put out into the light of day isn't worth nearly so much.

Think of the fertile soil where the magic of chemistry releases life from inside the husk of a seed...where it's not what is seen but what is felt...heat and coolness...molecules unlocking each other in a microscopic embrace...the whispering dance of life...

We are waiting now...like God's people in the time of Isaiah...whether we know it or not...for the treasures of darkness.

This is where the virus's undoing will be unlocked...in invisibly small places...hidden from our sight. It won't be a fanfare, really, not the moment of its undoing...It will be in the midst of a long...into the night...repetitive...monotonous...unglamorous road...littered with failures...reaching for the treasure in the dark that can help us find the way to fuller life...to undo this death-dealing monster.

Again, we don't act like this is true most of the time...but we do know that the things that happen in broad daylight are sometimes the least important...the least true.

This was certainly true in the time of Jesus. The Messiah moved about in hidden places. Held his identity a precious secret in so many ways. While the ones who entered cities with fanfare did not bring life with them.

Today in Matthew, we hear how the religious leaders speak, but dissemble...They have shiny, presentable, respectable (though not remotely respectful) words. But what they parade in the daylight is bankrupt and empty. And Jesus calls their bluff...showing them the very thing they value...and dismissing it. You can give the emperor back his stamped bit of metal, Jesus says. You can return vanity to where it came from...Ego is the snake eating its own tail. I don't care about that at all. That's not why I am here.

Jesus knows that the most precious treasure doesn't sparkle in the sunlight...because you can't put a price on the strong embrace that wraps around you after nightfall and tells you that you are precious and never alone. You can't tax love. And you can't extort a pure heart.

I expect if you sit for awhile and examine your life, you can find the treasures of darkness...the thing that don't sparkle and shine...but that are the very breath of life...the most precious things of all. You can, can't you?

You know this truth...even if...like me...it's not always something you realize because it's not something you have practiced knowing.

But, what if I told you that it is not only what is hidden within your life that is the treasure of darkness...but what is in the darkness of your very self that is a treasure, too?

The shiny, curated version of you that you put out into the light of day...on social media or among friends...or in your Christmas card...the way you frame up your camera in the zoom meeting so the disaster is just off screen...

God didn't come to live our life and die our death and defeat death so we could be with God always...to just have that part of you...that version of you.

The God who knows you fully...treasures the parts of you that you keep in darkness.

What is in the light...when it isn't real...when it isn't complete...isn't where God's treasure is.

Now I'm not saying that venturing into the darkness and hiddenness of ourselves isn't complicated...or scary.

When you start exploring your darkness...you can stub your toes...

When you have spent so much time in the light...your eyes take while to adjust...

And when they do...you may be confronted with things that you put in the darkness for a reason. But they are still there...and coming to peace with all our darkness...both the things we lost there that are beautiful and the things that we hid there out of shame...this is the journey to finding the treasure that is our own life.

In John Bell's beautiful hymn *The Summons*, he opens with the line "Will you come and follow me if I but call your name? Will you go where you don't know and never be the same?" But it's at the fourth verse that my voice always catches...because Bell has us sing to ourselves, in the voice of God, "Will you love the "you" you hide if I but call your name? Will you quell the fear inside and never be the same?"

We are in the midst of great struggles in our world. Struggles of fear as mortality stares us in the face even more than ever before each day. Struggles of unrest as those with power due to race or gender or wealth are called to account by those disempowered and oppressed across generations. Shame stalks the edges of all things...as we fear not doing enough...or being enough...to be worthy of life and love in the midst of a world in pain.

And the only way to the other side of all these fears is through them. The treasure is in the darkness...in places still hidden...beyond the manipulation of the Pharisees...beyond the ego of the empire...within each human life and heart. Within your life and heart. And Jesus is walking with us...into the very darkest places where we fear meeting the things that go bump in the night...or maybe even more...where we fear meeting ourselves.

And he is revealing to us the life that takes root in the hidden darkness. When you find yourself there, friends...know that you are not alone. Breathe...even if the air feels thin. Let your eyes adjust. Don't be afraid.

God is Lord. There is no other. No virus...no emperor or president or power will be able to claim you from the God who creates you. Hold this treasure in the darkest, most beautiful corner of your heart and let it grow.

You have all you need.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

As members of the Body of Christ, gathered here and across the world, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need.

Merciful God, we pray for the whole of your holy and apostolic Church, where it is in error, reform it. Where the Church speaks truth, strengthen it. Where the Church is divided, bring us together and unify it. Empower and strengthen us with your Holy Spirit that we may boldly proclaim the liberating good news of your unconditional love. Lord in your mercy.

Hear our Prayer.

God of all creation, renew and inspire leaders of every walk of life so that we may work together for the well being of all people created in your image. In a world suffering from conflict and division guide us to be peacemakers and agents of grace. Lord in your mercy.

Hear our Prayer.

God of healing, restore and renew all those wrestling with doubt, pain, or addiction. Give your healing touch to all those who are ill (especially...) and those who's sighs are too deep for words. Empower us to meet the days ahead with courage and a life-giving faith. Lord in your mercy.

Hear our Prayer.

Gracious Spirit, intercede for us with sighs too deep for words; keep us in true faith; and gather us with the whole church on earth, into the communion of the triune God.

Amen.

Thanksgiving for the Word

We bless you, generous God, for your holy Word that welcomes all to yourself. Your Word crosses every boundary and barrier to proclaim your abundant life. For your Word of new life, O God, **we give you thanks and praise!**

Your timeless Word has formed and reformed your Church throughout the ages. As we celebrate this good news, continue to set us free by your Word, O God, **that we might always be reformed to live out your love through our lives!**

Jesus is your Word into which we are welcomed in baptism to bear the fruit of your love. Through your Word of Jesus, O God, **send us to welcome others and form the world by your love!**

In thanks and praise for your reforming Word to change the world, Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray:

Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
forever and ever.

Amen.

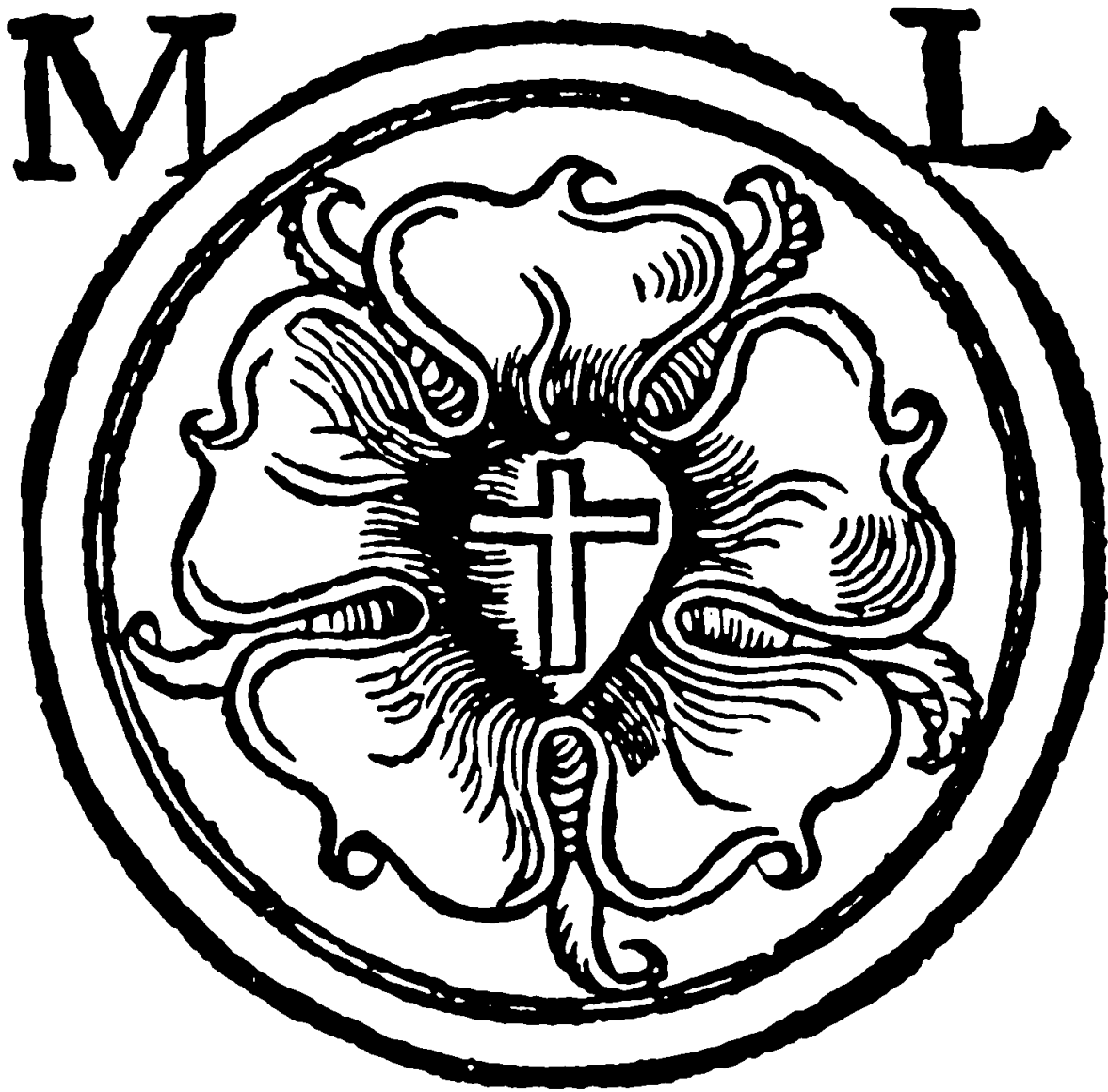
Closing Prayer

As we move from this time of worship, we rejoice O Lord that your peace abides with us. May it give us the patience and resilience to faithfully serve you with acts of love for our brothers and sisters even from our homes.

Amen.

REFORMATION SUNDAY

October 25 , 2020



REFORMATION SUNDAY

October 25 , 2020

Call To Worship

The LORD Almighty is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress.

Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way
and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea
the God of Jacob is our fortress.

There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy place where the Most High dwells.
the God of Jacob is our fortress.

(adapted from Psalm 46)

Prayer of the Day

Almighty and sovereign God, it is by your gifts of grace and faith that we find security, comfort, and courage in the face of a scary world. Embolden, enliven, and inspire us to do your work in our communities knowing that your love is leading us, and your Spirit is supporting us, through Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord.

Amen.

Reading - Psalm 46

- ¹ God is our refuge and strength,
an ever-present help in trouble.
- ² Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way
and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea,
- ³ though its waters roar and foam
and the mountains quake with their surging.^[c]
- ⁴ There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy place where the Most High dwells.
- ⁵ God is within her, she will not fall;
God will help her at break of day.
- ⁶ Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall;
he lifts his voice, the earth melts.
- ⁷ The LORD Almighty is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress.

⁸ Come and see what the LORD has done,
the desolations he has brought on the earth.

⁹ He makes wars cease
to the ends of the earth.

He breaks the bow and shatters the spear;
he burns the shields^[d] with fire.

¹⁰ He says, "Be still, and know that I am God;
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth."

¹¹ The LORD Almighty is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress.

Sermon - Rev. Darryl Thompson Powell, Associate Director for African Descent Ministries, ELCA and Pastor, Resurrection Lutheran, Elk Grove Village, IL

Today I want to take a moment to look at our Psalm for the day, and for a moment – with your prayers – I want to talk about **"Being Secure in an Unsafe World."**



No story for you today, but I do have some warning signs to show. You know you see them all over the place. They'll warn you about immediate dangers, like this one that says "Danger – Slippery Surface"

They'll warn you about potential dangers, like these from one of my favorite places – Hawaii – that warns of the potential for falling rocks AND flash floods.

Because of lawsuits, some places that serve coffee have to warn you "Caution: Beverages are extremely hot. Please make sure lid is secure and do not hold over or between lap."



I'm still not sure how you can hold something between your lap since it is the top of your legs, but don't do it with a hot beverage!



Some people think "Do not touch" is a suggestion so signs have to be explicit like this one:



"DANGER: Do Not Touch. Not only will this kill you, it will hurt the whole time you are dying."

Some have to state the obvious like this one at a pool: "Do Not Breath Underwater." Thanks! If you hadn't warned me I would have tried it.



Some realize that people don't really read signs unless you get their attention. "CAUTION: This sign has SHARP EDGES! Do not touch the edges of this sign. Also, the bridge is out ahead."

With other you wonder, "Really?" "Caution, Drunken People Crossing."





While with others you just wonder what they really mean. Does this mean “Dancing deer ahead?” If so, that would be something to see!

These signs remind us that we live in an unsafe world. Our news media reminds us of that every day as they tell us of new things that we eat or do that could possibly kill us. Plus, there are the headline stories about wrong-way drivers on the road, increased gun violence, and of course, COVID-19!

9/11 shocked many people not because of how many people died but because it shattered the sense of safety that folks had. I'm not going to sugar coat it: we live in an unsafe world. It's no wonder that people are constantly looking for ways to be secure living in an unsafe world.

It's nothing new, though. The psalmist – probably David – tells us through his own experience: “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.” That's where we can find true security and peace.

I love this psalm because David reminds us that **our security is in God, not in this world.** It's a simple thing but one that we miss. David tell us that we are to look to the Creator, not the creation. We are to love the Giver, not the gifts. There are towering trees, beautiful mountains, splendid oceans, animals, birds and plants. But when it comes down to it, this world has little to offer us. The earth can give way, the mountains can fall into the sea, and the waters can roar and foam as the mountains quake.

We've got to turn to God because God alone can be our refuge and strength. God is our ever-present help. God is our hope, and nothing else. We have only one source of security and it's not the FDIC, the U.S. military or the local police; it's God. When the stock market drops and terrorism rises... When natural disasters destroy our homes and corrupt politicians destroy our state... When COVID-19 and street shootings threaten us... When our health fails us and friends betray us, faith in God is the only place we can find security. Our world, with all its advancements and the scientific miracles that exist, isn't any safer today than it was thousands of years ago. Sadly, we feel more unsafe today than those days when people live in villages or wooden huts.

In this day and age, we are not guaranteed safety. Let me share this with you: According to several preachers, about forty years ago an older couple, who were about to retired, became alarmed at the threat of a nuclear war. They wanted to find the location that would give them the best chance of survival in the event of an atomic catastrophe. Eventually they did find such a place. That Christmas they sent their ex-pastor and friends a card from their new home. They had found their ark of absolute security in some islands off the coast of Argentina in the South Atlantic. When people got the card, nobody had any idea where these islands were. Less than a year later everybody knew when Argentina and

Great Britain, who both claimed to own these islands, were engaged in a war there and everybody knew about the Falkland Islands.ⁱⁱ

Anything can happen, at any second. We need to have disaster, anti-terrorism, and COVID-19 drills because we are at the whim of circumstance. But there is no guarantee. There is no security UNLESS we've placed ourselves in the hand of the one who holds eternity, who is in control of all things.

Martin Luther reminded the church that we need to turn to God, more so in these last days. Only when we seek God, can we find rest for our soul. David wrote, "Be still, and know that I am God!"ⁱⁱⁱ

The psalmist also said, "Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God. They are brought to their knees and fall, but we rise up and stand firm."^{iv}

God is waiting to hear us call to the creator of all for help. And if we call, God will respond. I think that's important to hear because too often when Christians feel insecure, they stop coming to church. When you are secure in God, you don't need the security of other things. God is still in control and seated firmly on the throne. That's why we can say: "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea."^v Our security is in God and not in this world.

David also reminds us that **our security comes from our faith, not from our circumstance.** David was facing all kinds of problems when he wrote this psalm. Most likely he was being attacked on all sides by Saul or some other king and had found a place of relative safety. But the psalmist was able to feel secure and happy despite the turmoil around him. He says in verse 5, "God is within [the city], she will not fall,"^{vi} and in verse 7, "The Lord Almighty is with us..."^{vii} David's faith is in the presence of God, and that gives him hope and security. Not because the city has huge walls or strong gates... Not because he has the best trained military with incredible weapons... Not because they've established security checkpoints to keep out all the terrorist and killer diseases, but because God is with them.

Too many people pray for the wrong things: good life, good car, good job, more money. No doubt, God can bless us materially with riches. I'm sure God wants us to enjoy the good gifts we receive just as we want our children to enjoy what we give them. But God doesn't want us to depend on the created. God wants us to depend on the Creator! Our trust is not in things, but in God.

What we need to pray for is strong faith. Pray that in the midst of a changing world we'll continue to trust that God is with us. God's presence should be our peace and joy. We want to have faith in God no matter what happens. Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid."^{viii}

We know that there are folks who live with great prosperity – they have lots of money and possessions - but they are consumed with worry and fear. On the flip side, there are those in

our world today who live in very difficult and dangerous places but have a great sense of security because they have placed their faith and hope in God.

Job lost everything around him, but he chose to place his trust in God. Job was shaken but he didn't fall. The 125th Psalm says, "Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion, which cannot be shaken but endures forever."^x So let's be clear here: security isn't the absence of trouble but the confidence and courage we have in the midst of trouble. And that confidence and courage comes from faith in God. It's this faith that gives David the courage to say, "We will not fear."^x

We need to have the same courage today. Jesus said, "I've told you all this so that trusting me, you will be unshakable and assured, deeply at peace. In this godless world you will continue to experience difficulties. But take heart! I've conquered the world."^{xi} Our confidence can't be shaken, because we have a God who's in complete control! We have courage not because we are strong but because our God is strong! God is powerful and rules over all. God hasn't changed and God's love will see us through.

We are secure in an unsafe world because of our faith and not our circumstance, knowing that the One who loves us is with us.

Finally, David reminds us that **our security is in eternity and not in the present**. "Come and see the works of the Lord." In other words, ultimately God wins. I have to remind you that this world isn't our home. If you're looking just at your present circumstances you will be shaken, you will tremble. But if your life is grounded in eternity, you can stand firm.

As Christians, our lives have an eternal dimension. We must remember that nothing that happens here can harm or change the things that matter most: our relationship with God through Jesus and our promised home in heaven. Nothing can change those things. No one can take them away.

The articulate African Apostle Paul said "...that every detail in our lives of love for God is worked into something good."^{xii} God works in every situation of our lives to bring about divine good. God doesn't cause them, but God does use them.

The COVID-19 pandemic isn't the will of God. God didn't send the disease to punish the people of the world, but God will use it for God's eternal purpose.

The killing of unarmed Black and Brown people that have happened across our country hasn't been the will of God. The people who have done it have gone against God's will. God had nothing to do with it...but God will use these things for God's eternal purposes.

Our confidence doesn't go up and down with this year's roller coaster stock market. Our security isn't in how good the news is on television. God says through the psalmist, "Be still, and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth."^{xiii}

There is evil in the world. The devil is active! But God is in the world also. The Creator's heart is for the created. Jesus tells us that God will still judge the evil in this world and ultimately good

will triumph over evil, truth will be victorious over the lie, and love will trump hate. Thanks to Jesus, we know the end of the story: God wins.

In this world, there are no guarantees for any of us. We're not immune to the harms of this world. But – Hallelujah! – we are loved! God the Father watches over God's children and that is our security. The song says, "This world is not our home, we're just passing through. Our treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue."^{xiv}

Beloved, despite all the dangers around us, we can still feel secure in this unsafe world. We can feel secure because we know our security is in God, not in this world. We can feel secure because we know our security comes from our faith, not from our circumstance. And we can feel secure because we know our security is in eternity and not in the present.

God is good...all the time...and God will lead us safely back to our eternal home. No matter where our journey takes us, God takes our hand and walks beside us. That's good news! And that's great security.

Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

As members of the Body of Christ, gathered here and across the world, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need.

Gracious host, empower your church with a commitment to welcome and hospitality. We pray for bishops, pastors, deacons, teachers, lay leaders, and all the baptized as they invite others to your table of forgiveness, reconciliation, and grace. Lord in your mercy,

Hear our Prayer.

Lord of east and west, north and south, there are no boundaries to your transforming love. Help and equip diplomats, mayors, governors, and all elected officials to set a table for peace. Open clear lines of communication and understanding so that justice and relief for the oppressed and marginalized prevails. Lord in your mercy,

Hear our Prayer.

God of healing, bring your grace and comfort to all who are tired or ill. Especially all those we hold close in our hearts who hunger for a special measure of your grace. Strengthen and equip doctors, nurses, first responders, and caretakers with the resources they need to bring lasting healing for all in need. Lord in your mercy,

Hear our Prayer.

Gracious Spirit, intercede for us with sighs too deep for words; keep us in true faith; and gather us with the whole church on earth, into the communion of the triune God.

Amen.

Thanksgiving for the Word

We bless you, generous God, for your holy Word that welcomes all to yourself. Your Word crosses every boundary and barrier to proclaim your abundant life. For your Word of new life, O God, **we give you thanks and praise!**

Your timeless Word has formed and reformed your Church throughout the ages. As we celebrate this good news, continue to set us free by your Word, O God, **that we might always be reformed to live out your love through our lives!**

Jesus is your Word into which we are welcomed in baptism to bear the fruit of your love. Through your Word of Jesus, O God, **send us to welcome others and form the world by your love!**

In thanks and praise for your reforming Word to change the world, Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray:

Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
forever and ever.

Amen.

Closing Prayer

As we move from this time of worship, we rejoice O Lord that your peace abides with us. May it give us the patience and resilience to faithfully serve you with acts of love for our brothers and sisters even from our homes.

Amen.

Adapted from a sermon by Ken Klaus, www.lutheranhour.org/sermon.asp?articleid=1764

Psalm 46:10

Psalm 20:7-8 (NIV)

Psalm 46:1-2 (NIV)

Psalm 46:5 (NIV)

Psalm 46:7 (NIV)

John 14:27 (NRSV)

Psalm 125:1 (NIV)

Psalm 46:2

John 16:33 (The Message)

Rom 8:28 (The Message)

Psalm 46:10

This World is Not My Home (paraphrased)

ALL SAINTS DAY
November 1, 2020



ALL SAINTS DAY

November 1, 2020

Call To Worship

You are God my stronghold

Send me your light and your faithful care.

Rescue me from those who are deceitful and wicked

Send me your light and your faithful care.

I will praise you with the lyre, O God, my God

Send me your light and your faithful care.

(adapted from Psalm 43)

Prayer of the Day

Almighty God, you have knit your people together by the waters of Baptism, and sustained them through the power of the Eucharist from generation to generation. Be with us this day as we remember all those we have loved who have gone before us. Hold us close and remind us that either separated by death or distance, you are our God who brings life to all, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Amen.

Gospel - Matthew 5:1-12

Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, ²and he began to teach them.

He said:

³ "Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴ Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.

⁵ Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.

⁶ Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.

⁷ Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.

⁸ Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.

⁹ Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.

¹⁰ Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹ "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Sermon - Rev. Dominic V. Guido, Pastor, Gloria Dei Lutheran Church, Crestview Hills, KY

I did my required part-time field work during my second year of seminary in the south suburbs of Chicago. I served at a small, aging congregation, where my field work supervisor: the pastor, was the only full-time person on the payroll. And, many folks would joke about that congregation that it only continued to exist so that "the old Swedes" could have their high church liturgies with bells and incense and all the trappings. And, what trappings they were. There was an entire wall of the worship space that was filled with votive candle holders, which could be changed out depending on the liturgical color. There was a shining, polished golden gospel book that was carried to the altar in procession every week. There was quite possibly the largest beeswax paschal candle that I have ever seen, replaced new each and every Easter. And, all of these trappings were placed within an aging, dated worship space, which was growing more and more in need of repair each day. Every All Saints Sunday, they would bring in extra choir members from nearby college music programs. Every All Saints Sunday, they would light the incense and have a gospel procession. Every All Saints Sunday, they would sing the Litany of the Saints (changed from "Pray for us," to "Pray with us," so as to make it more confessionally Lutheran and less Roman Catholic).

Every All Saints Sunday that I spent in that congregation, I would watch the light from the votives on the wall stream through the smoke from the incense, all while the professionally enhanced choir intoned: "All you holy men and women, pray with us." And, in the sensory experience of the smell, and the sight, and the sound, I found myself momentarily transported. I imagined the holy ones of God mentioned in the litany: Saint Mary, the mother of Christ; Saint Elizabeth, her cousin and the mother of John the Baptizer; Saint John the Baptizer himself; as well as the Apostles: Peter and Paul, Andrew, James, John and all the rest. I imagined them as they are so often depicted in the Renaissance Era art that so often serves as the touchstone for my imagination, even as I know that its depictions don't match historical reality. But, that was the image in my head. We were surrounded in that moment by the saints of God: resplendent looking, holy, and powerful, joining us in lifting up prayers to the Almighty. I felt drawn out of myself, and into something larger. But, like the smoke of the incense in the thurible, I could only perceive it for a moment, and then it was gone, and I was back in the aging, crumbling worship space. And, I would just spend the rest of the

service wanting to get back to wherever it was that I had found myself with all those saints for that beautiful moment.

And, that is a trap that is so easy for me to fall into. It is all too easy for me to think that the place to find the Holy Ones of God is distant, and far away: removed from this reality. I longed so deeply to be pulled out of where I was. I longed to find God. I longed to experience that reality that St. Matthew's gospel calls the Kingdom of Heaven. And so, when the Word of God encounters me today in these well-know Beatitudes from Matthew, it sort of hits me like a splash of cold water, reminding me of that fundamental truth that this gospel account repeats over and over and over that the Kingdom of Heaven is not far away: the Kingdom of Heaven has come near.

Because when Jesus proclaims these blessings, he is doing something radical. When Jesus says that the meek are blessed and that the peacemakers are children of God, business as usual is flipped on its head. When Jesus announces comfort for those who mourn and invites the persecuted to rejoice and be glad, he is not saying something that makes a whole lot of sense from our normal point of view.

The places that we so often look for blessing, the places that we expect to notice the presence of God, the places where we look for holiness, the places where we (like I did back in my field work congregation) want to try and find God's saints: these places are so often places that we imagine are far removed, distant (either by time or place) somehow closer to God than our present realities. And, I think that's because so often we don't think that we are particularly close to God ourselves.

Now at this point, the comparison that almost every sermon that I've ever heard on All Saints' Day using this Beatitudes story draws, is to compare the suffering of the groups that Jesus names to be blessed, and the lives of (generally speaking) ease that the assembled congregation leads. The preacher will usually tell their primarily white, primarily affluent congregation that the people who are truly blessed are the ones who understand the beauty in having little, the simple joys present even in a life of hardship, and no second boat, no vacation timeshare, no expensive watch is going to provide the sort of blessing that Jesus describes in these words from the Sermon on the Mount. The antidote therefore is to stop and smell the roses, to appreciate what we have, to see the blessings in our lives. But, I'm not sure that's really what Jesus is saying here. Remember, I just said that I think the problem is that we think that God, can't possibly be near to us. But, Jesus says quite the opposite: the places that you think Jesus can't or won't or shouldn't come near are precisely the places where Jesus goes.

Jesus seeks out the hurting places in our world. Jesus seeks out the hurting places in our lives. Jesus finds the middle-aged parent anxiously awaiting the COVID-19 test results, mourning with anticipation and anxiety and unable to make peace. Jesus searches for the elder begging for God's mercy in the midst of chronic illness and pain. Jesus pursues the young person hungering and thirsting for a world that is more just, more peaceful, more righteous than the world they have thus far known. Jesus finds those places, where everything seems wrong, and those are the places to which Jesus himself comes.

This is in many ways one of the major notes that the gospel of Matthew hits again and again, that Jesus is Emmanuel: God with us. In the incarnation of Christ, God finds us. When we feel as though we are separated from God, Christ comes to be with us. When we think that we could not possibly be holy, when we think that the saints of God must have left the building, we are reminded that in the holy waters of baptism **we ourselves** are God's saints: whether we gather together in a crumbling building, whether we join with others online, or whether we seek out the presence of God in solitude (chosen or forced). On this All Saints' Day, as every day, we are all God's saints. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

Open to the gifts of the Holy Spirit, we pray for the church, the world, and all of God's creation.

Holy God, we thank you for your presence in our world. Through good times and bad, you are our constant rock, our fortress, and salvation. Thank you for holding us when we are scared, mending us when we are broken, and finding us when we are lost in the darkness of night. Lord In Your Mercy.

Hear our Prayer.

God Of All Time and Space, on this All Saints Sunday we remember all those we love that have gone before us. Especially we remember those who have died in the last year. Lord we pray your light, your compassion, and your care for all those who ache with the sadness of loss in their lives. Lord In Your Mercy.

Hear our Prayer.

God of hope and wholeness, you speak to your saints of all ages, calling, caring, and loving your children of many tribes. Be with all those around the world suffering & in pain; those drawing to the end of their live's journeys; and those entombed by the pressures of the world. Those we name before you now, both silently and aloud. Lord In Your Mercy.

Hear our Prayer.

Trusting in your mercy and goodness, we bring before you these prayers and whatever else you see that we need, in the name of the one who sets us free, Jesus Christ, our Savior.

Amen.

Thanksgiving for the Word

We bless you, God of hope, for your holy Word that endures forever. Your Word has inspired the faithful saints before us, among us, and beyond us to proclaim your glory. For your everlasting Word, O God, **we give you thanks and praise!**

Your powerful Word is justice for the poor and oppressed, food for the hungry, and life for the dead. Continue to call us by your Word, O God, **that we may bring your kingdom near!**

Jesus is your Word present from the beginning of all time; in all time; for all time. Through your Word of Jesus, O God, **hold us close as you send us to proclaim your justice and peace in the world!**

In thanks and praise for your faithful Word through all generations, Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray:

Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
forever and ever.

Amen.

Closing Prayer

As we move from this time of worship, we rejoice O Lord that your peace abides with us. May it give us the patience and resilience to faithfully serve you with acts of love for our brothers and sisters even from our homes.

Amen.

TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENECCOST

November 8, 2020



TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENECCOST

November 8, 2020

Call To Worship

Hasten, O God, to save me;
come quickly, LORD, to help me.

May all who seek you
rejoice and be glad in you;
may those who long for your saving help always say,
"The LORD is great!"
come quickly, LORD, to help me.

You are my help and my deliverer
come quickly, LORD, to help me.

(adapted from Psalm 70)

Prayer of the Day

Eternal God, Alpha and Omega, you speak to your people across time, calling us to be ready and prepared as we face unknown challenges. Grant us persistence, resilience, and faithfulness as we seek to spread your word during these challenging days, by the power of you and the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever.

Amen.

Gospel - Matthew 13:1-13

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. ²Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. ³Then he told them many things in parables, saying: "A farmer went out to sow his seed. ⁴As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. ⁶But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. ⁷Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. ⁸Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. ⁹Whoever has ears, let them hear." ¹⁰The disciples came to him and asked, "Why do you speak to the people in parables?" ¹¹He replied, "Because

the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. ¹² Whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. ¹³ This is why I speak to them in parables: "Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand.

Sermon - Rev. Jeff Schlesinger, Pastor, Heart of Illinois Lutheran Parish (First Lutheran, Lee IL and Immanuel Lutheran, Compton, IL)

I remember the day well. It was February 1, 2015. It was the 17th anniversary of my ordination. In those 17 years as a pastor I had not once had to cancel a worship service. And that included six years of ministry in northern Wisconsin where the winters could be quite harsh.

But on that Sunday in 2015 (Super Bowl Sunday actually) I woke up to find ten inches of snow already on the ground. But, the stubborn German that I am, I set off for church – which for me, at that time, was one of our Lutheran camps as I was a developing pastor for a new congregation which met at the camp. Though it was only two miles away, that drive made the decision to cancel easy. It took 25 minutes to traverse those two miles, even though there was no traffic - I don't believe I saw another car. In fact, at one point I had to bring the car to a stop on the highway due to complete white out. When I got back into town, I sat in McDonalds sipping a hot cup of coffee, texting and emailing the congregation to "stay home and stay safe." When I arrived back to the apartment where I was staying, I had to "shovel myself in" as it had snowed so much since I left.

Little did I know then, that just five years later I would be sending that same message to my congregations, but in an entirely different and unforeseen context. In 2015, the unspoken part of that message was pretty clear, "stay home and stay safe... until we can dig out of this blizzard." But in 2020, the unspoken part of that message remains unspoken, "stay home and stay safe until... who knows?"

"Stay home and stay safe. Someday this will be over. Someday there will be a vaccine and a treatment. We're not sure when. But some day." It is in the context of the corona virus pandemic that we hear Jesus' parable of the ten bridesmaids.

I like to call this parable "the first of the last." It is the first of three parables that are essentially Jesus' final teachings as Matthew tells the gospel story. You will hear the other two parables next week and the week after as we bring this church year to its conclusion. I once had a speech teacher tell me that the first and last words of your speech are the most important, for those are what people remember the most. Therefore, brothers and sisters, pay attention these next few weeks, for these are Jesus' last words.

And the point of the first of these last words is quite plain: "Keep awake. Be ready. Be prepared."

This message of course comes in the midst of a story about a wedding. A rather strange story at that. Now, I could go off into a historical explanation of weddings during Jesus' time but I won't – I want you to keep reading. (If I were preaching to you in-person, I'd say, "I won't because I want you to stay awake.") In fact, I'm not sure it is that important. Quite honestly, I think Jesus is probably using the wedding context for his parable to add some entertaining absurdity to the story. Even given the wedding practices of the day, it seems rather absurd that bridesmaids would show up without the one thing they needed for their job, that the bridegroom would be so delayed for his own wedding, or that they would begin the wedding proceedings at midnight.

No, I don't think Jesus expects us to dig deeply into the metaphor of the wedding itself. I'm not sure if he tells the story of the wedding to add comic relief or for its shock value. But in either case, he is using it to bring home his point: keep awake, be ready, be prepared.

Through your baptism, you have been called, brothers and sisters, to be part of God's kingdom. And you have a job to do in that kingdom. Just like the bridesmaids in this wedding were charged with carrying the lamps (that led the procession perhaps), you have been charged with specific tasks as part of God's kingdom. Those tasks may be different than those of your fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, but you have been called to use your gifts and talents for the good of the kingdom. Keep awake. Be ready to use your gifts. Be prepared.

But the thing is, life throws curveballs. Sometimes the bridegroom is delayed. Sometimes blizzards come. Sometimes pandemics disrupt life as we know it. When that happens, it is not time to throw in the towel. Nor is it time to go find a merchant to purchase some oil, as it is probably too late anyway. When things aren't going according to plan, it's time to adapt and be creative. The charge to proclaim the good news, to love God and love your neighbor – those don't go away when life goes awry. Keep awake. Be ready. Be prepared to try something new and different.

I remember that Sunday when we first suspended worship due to corona virus. It was an excruciating decision. Not because it wasn't the right thing to do, but due to how ominous it was. Unlike cancelling one week of worship due to a blizzard, on March 15th we suspended worship indefinitely. When we began, I was keenly aware that it was highly likely that we would not be gathering for Easter worship. The facts directed us to the correct decision to suspend worship, but my heart did not want to do it.

But, I realized immediately that my call to provide worship and keep my congregations connected with their savior was not suspended. I needed to adapt. That first Sunday morning I was the only one in the church and I recorded as much of the service as I could. I figured I'd record during the normal worship times, throw the video together, post it to YouTube and have it to my people Sunday afternoon. I was foolish in my timeline, but not in my persistence. I worked all morning and afternoon recording and putting together the

video. And then that evening I learned that rural internet service is very, very, very slow in upload speeds. It literally took all night to upload that first worship video. Finally, on Monday morning, my people had their first opportunity to worship in their homes.

My worship videos have gotten much more sophisticated and their production is much more efficient. And we continue to make them almost eight months later even though we have begun to gather for in-person worship again. But there are many who don't feel safe returning in groups even though we've limited it to 50 worshippers at a given service. And we affirm that as no one should feel unsafe when they are in worship. So we do our best to adapt and provide as needed. We do our best to keep awake; to be ready; to be prepared.

The story of First Lutheran in Lee, IL and Immanuel Lutheran in Compton, IL (the congregations of Heart of Illinois Lutheran Parish where I serve) is probably not all that different from the story of your congregation. Congregations all over the country have figured out new and varying ways to continue their ministry. Bishop Eaton said it well when she responded to a question from the media, "The Church has never been closed. We've found different ways to gather, mostly digital. But we're also continuing all of our work of prayer, Bible study, and serving our neighbor." (May 27, 2020 interview on CNN) The fact that you are reading this message in an in-home worship package is one way in which the Church remains open – continuing to proclaim the good news of Christ. The doors to our buildings may be closed, but our mission is not.

Keep awake. Be ready. Be prepared. That is the point of the first of Jesus' final three stories he tells. Hold on to those words, brothers and sisters. For next week as you hear the story of the talents, and the following week when Jesus shares the story of the sheep and the goats, he wants this to be echoing in your ears: keep awake, be ready, be prepared.

Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

Open to the gifts of the Holy Spirit, we pray for the church, the world, and all of God's creation.

Holy God, Master of the Universe, when we look at the heavens, we see the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you established. Thank you for the joy of this creation that we share and grant us the peace and serenity to share it with one another. Lord In Your Mercy.

Hear our Prayer.

Most Holy Trinity, we ask you to bless our nation with understanding, patience, and tolerance. With the election behind us, may all who inhabit this great land work together for the betterment of all humankind. Lord In Your Mercy.

Hear our Prayer.

God of hope and wholeness, we thank you for sending you Son to heal all those who suffer, we thank you for the gift of comfort that the Spirit that brings as we wait for your return. We pray for all those we know, those in need of your care & companionship, your wholeness & your presence. Be with all those we name before you now, both silently and aloud. Lord In Your Mercy.

Hear our Prayer.

Trusting in your mercy and goodness, we bring before you these prayers and whatever else you see that we need, in the name of the one who sets us free, Jesus Christ, our Savior.

Amen.

Thanksgiving for the Word

We bless you, God of hope, for your holy Word that endures forever. Your Word has inspired the faithful saints before us, among us, and beyond us to proclaim your glory. For your everlasting Word, O God, **we give you thanks and praise!**

Your powerful Word is justice for the poor and oppressed, food for the hungry, and life for the dead. Continue to call us by your Word, O God, **that we may bring your kingdom near!**

Jesus is your Word present from the beginning of all time; in all time; for all time. Through your Word of Jesus, O God, **hold us close as you send us to proclaim your justice and peace in the world!**

In thanks and praise for your faithful Word through all generations, Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray:

Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
forever and ever.

Amen.

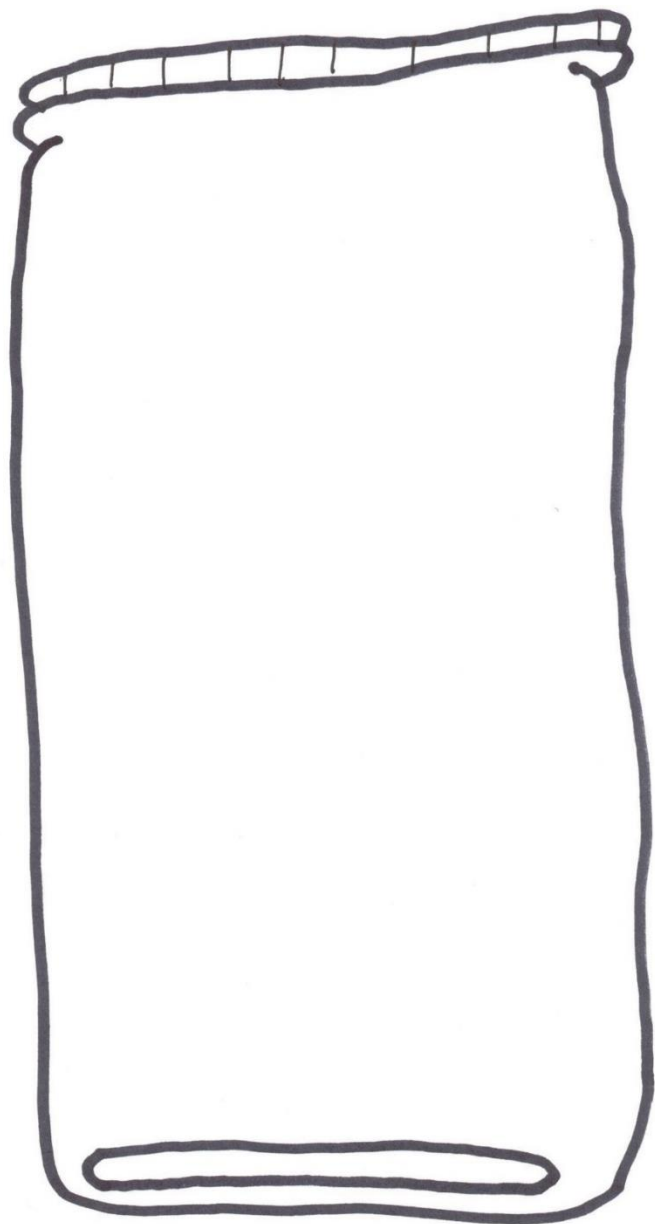
Closing Prayer

As we move from this time of worship, we rejoice O Lord that your peace abides with us. May it give us the patience and resilience to faithfully serve you with acts of love for our brothers and sisters even from our homes.

Amen.

TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENECCOST

November 15, 2020



TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENECCOST

November 15, 2020

Call To Worship

You have shaken the land and torn it open;
mend its fractures, for it is quaking;
now restore us!

But for those who fear you, you have raised a banner
to be unfurled against the bow;
now restore us!

Save us and help us with your right hand,
that those you love may be delivered;
now restore us!

(adapted from Psalm 90)

Prayer of the Day

Almighty and compassionate God, we implore you to hold us, strengthen us, and guide us as we remain faced with the hard choices of life. Grant us the courage to make hard decisions knowing that your love is supporting us, and your Spirit is guiding us, now and forever.

Amen.

Gospel - Matthew 25:14-30

¹⁴ "Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. ¹⁵ To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, ¹⁶ each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. ¹⁶ The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. ¹⁷ So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. ¹⁸ But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. ¹⁹ "After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. ²⁰ The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more.' ²¹ "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!' ²² "The man with two bags of gold also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two bags of gold; see, I have gained two more.' ²³ "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been

faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!' ²⁴ "Then the man who had received one bag of gold came. 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. ²⁵ So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.' ²⁶ "His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? ²⁷ Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest. ²⁸ "'So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags. ²⁹ For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. ³⁰ And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

Sermon - Rev. Louise C. Hilbert, Pastor, North Carolina Synod, Durham, NC

RISK AND REWARD

As we come to the end of the church year, we often hear hard words from Jesus. None of really likes to hear such things. We would much rather hear about God's love and forgiveness. Yet Jesus tells us these stories in his last days before his Passion and we need to listen to them and wrestle with their meaning and purpose.

Today's reading from Matthew is a story of wealth and risk. We live in a society that values wealth, that sees it as a sign of success. If you are doing well financially, you may like the parable of the talents. After all, it says to those who have much, more will be given. You may read the words and think, yes, that is me. I am doing well, and God blesses me even further. You may be a person who believes what the prosperity gospel preachers on TV say. You know, things like, "God wants you to be rich. God wants you to have all your needs met. God wants you to be rewarded. If you have such things, it is because God loves you more."

On the other hand, if you are struggling, you may be appalled at this parable. You may identify with the servant who was given little, who faithfully kept what he had, but did not increase it. So, the harsh master took away even what he had been given and gave it to one who already had much. You may be horrified at the words of the master in this parable when he says, "For to those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away."

This seems to be at odds with many other things Jesus says about caring for the poor, for the least and the lowly. In fact, if you read on in this chapter, you will find just such words in the parable of the sheep and goats. We need to look beyond the surface of the words used, for this parable is more complicated than it may seem.

First, this has often been used as a text for a stewardship sermon because it comes during the season of the year when we ask folks to fill out pledge cards and time and talent sheets. These words have been used to suggest that if you give your money freely, you will be

blessed in return. Think about it, Jesus did not ask for a pledge from us. He asked for us to give our whole lives to him which includes what we have and who we are, all of it.

Second, the word "talent" does not refer to our abilities as we now use it, but to a standard of money, worth about 15 years of labor for an everyday worker. So, the first servants in this parable were given an absolutely extravagant amount of money to manage, but even the one given a single talent was given a fortune. How much each of these servants received was a decision the master made for reasons we do not know.

The servants did choose how to manage the gift over which they were stewards. Two of them acted as financial investment brokers taking risks and one, in his fearful caution, kept and protected his portion. It is interesting to wonder what the master would have done if the investments had not prospered and the money had been lost. Then the one who had kept all he had been given, even though he buried it, might be a hero.

This story was told by Jesus in the last few days of his earthly life. The very next chapter in Matthew is the beginning of the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Does this flavor his words? Is Jesus talking about risk taking for the sake of the kingdom of heaven? Surely, he takes risks by speaking out and acting in ways that are at odds with the religious and political establishment and he ends up dying for his risk-taking.

Perhaps this parable is told so that the followers of Jesus are aware of the need to take risks in following him. Just sitting around and saying you believe in Jesus but doing nothing is rather like the servant who did nothing with the treasure he was given while his master was away. The gifts of forgiveness and salvation were not given for us to bury or hoard or keep to ourselves.

God's gift of new life was given to be proclaimed and used. In other words, risks are to be taken with the extravagant gift we have received. We are to tell everyone about Jesus. We are to give of ourselves. We are to speak for those who have no voice. We are to see others as worthy of our attention. We give our love which we have first received from God. As good stewards we invest our resources and our very selves in the mission and ministry of the church and the community where we live.

This difficult parable told in Jesus' last days is one we need to ponder. For what we do know is that Jesus gave himself away for us. His sacrifice was given for us so that as we are marked with his cross and claimed by his limitless love, we in turn give ourselves away for the sake of our sisters and brothers who need to know and experience God's love.

Think about what risks you are willing to take to share God's love. Are there things that you need to do to work for justice? Are there people who need your time and energy? Are there folks who you could share your money or other resources with? Can you invest what God has given you in others? These are questions I think we might all do well to ask ourselves today.

May God guide your asking and your answering such questions.

Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

Open to the gifts of the Holy Spirit, we pray for the church, the world, and all of God's creation.

God Almighty, you bless us with so many things, our selves, our times, and our possessions. Thank you for the many blessing in our lives, and the people we get to share them with. Lord, help us to remember that all we have comes from you, as we join in the thanksgiving of worship here today. Lord In Your Mercy.

Hear our Prayer.

God of All People, we thank you for the opportunity to help those around us. We thank you for the spirit of generosity that inspires us to help those caught in hard times. We thank you for the confidence you give us to invest ourselves in you. Lord In Your Mercy.

Hear our Prayer.

God of wholeness and peace, we pray your spirit of healing on all your children around the world. May the lost and lonely find comfort in you, may the sad and depressed find hope and direction through you, and may the sick and the dying find wholeness by you. Be with all those we name before you now, both silently and aloud. Lord In Your Mercy.

Hear our Prayer.

Trusting in your mercy and goodness, we bring before you these prayers and whatever else you see that we need, in the name of the one who sets us free, Jesus Christ, our Savior.

Amen.

Thanksgiving for the Word

We bless you, God of hope, for your holy Word that endures forever. Your Word has inspired the faithful saints before us, among us, and beyond us to proclaim your glory. For your everlasting Word, O God, **we give you thanks and praise!**

Your powerful Word is justice for the poor and oppressed, food for the hungry, and life for the dead. Continue to call us by your Word, O God, **that we may bring your kingdom near!**

Jesus is your Word present from the beginning of all time; in all time; for all time. Through your Word of Jesus, O God, **hold us close as you send us to proclaim your justice and peace in the world!**

In thanks and praise for your faithful Word through all generations, Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray:

Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
forever and ever.

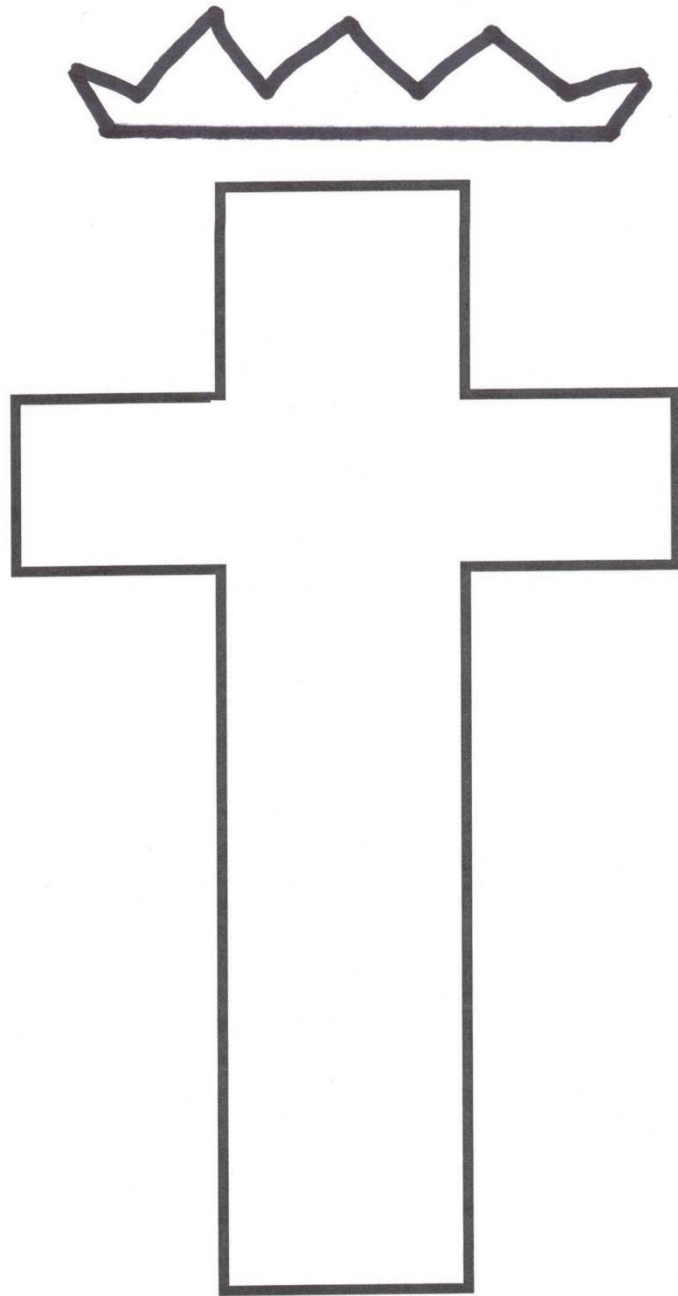
Amen.

Closing Prayer

As we move from this time of worship, we rejoice O Lord that your peace abides with us. May it give us the patience and resilience to faithfully serve you with acts of love for our brothers and sisters even from our homes.

Amen.

CHRIST THE KING
November 22, 2020



CHRIST THE KING

November 22, 2020

Call To Worship

Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord;
let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.

Let us bow down in worship,
let us kneel before the Lord our Maker;
let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.

For the Lord is the great God,
the great King above all gods;
let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.

(adapted from Psalm 95)

Prayer of the Day

Christ you are our Savior, our Lord, and our King. As this church year comes to an end, empower us to continue being an outpost of the kingdom of heaven in the year ahead. Strengthen us to live into your covenant to the best of our abilities by the power of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Gospel - Matthew 25:31-46

³¹ "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. ³² All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, ³³ and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. ³⁴ Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; ³⁵ for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶ I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' ³⁷ Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? ³⁸ And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? ³⁹ And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' ⁴⁰ And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to

me.’⁴¹ Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; ⁴² for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³ I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ ⁴⁴ Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?’ ⁴⁵ Then he will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ ⁴⁶ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

Sermon - Rev. A. Wallace Anderson, (Retired), St. Martin Lutheran Church, Malvern, OH

OUR CONTRACT WITH CHRIST THE KING

Grace be unto you and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord, Jesus Christ, amen.

Aren't you glad the election season is over?! We have a newly elected President, and maybe he's the one you voted for, and maybe not, but now we are entering into a period of transition from one administration to another. It's a period in which we demonstrate once again how the smooth transition of power makes America the shining example of democracy that it was meant to be. In a democracy everyone has a chance to voice their opinion through the ballot box—whether you voted in person or by absentee ballot. Now all the votes have been counted, and our differences and divisions have all been aired. What happens next? I believe that according to the social contract which makes us a democratic republic we should all draw together in support of the majority, put our differences aside, and strive to work as a united United States of America.

We bear a contract—a covenant, an agreement that we make to three entities: our government, to one another, and to God. A contract creates a relationship between two people, and whether it be for good or for evil, it doesn't matter—that relationship needs to be honored, or the contract is broken. In biblical times there was a word that described a relationship that was honored, and that word was “righteous”. In order for us to be righteous, we need to honor the contracts we make, whatever the cost. Take a moment to consider, “What is our contract and what must we do to be righteous with our government, with one another, and with God?”

For the sake of clarity, let's begin with that word “righteous”. Biblical righteousness was not defined as being good, even though it may have appeared that way in Sunday school classes. I know that I always wondered how Abraham could be considered righteous in the book of Genesis (Gen. 15:6) when he sold his wife off twice (Gen. 12:10-16; 20:1-3), or when he sent Hagar away with her son Ishmael when it was Sarah who offered her to him when she was barren (Gen 16:6). And what about Jacob, who stole his brother's birthright by following his mother Rebekah's advice to deceive his father Isaac out of Esau's birthright blessing (Gen. 27:5-10)? David, greatest king of all Israel and forefather of our savior Jesus

Christ was guilty of adultery with Bathsheba, impregnating her, and then arranging for her husband's death on the battlefield (2 Sam. 11). And Rahab the harlot, who sheltered the Israelite spies from the leaders of Jericho, betrayed her city, resulting in the deaths of everyone except her family (Jos. 2:2-6; 6:24-25). These people were not without fault, not without blood on their hands, and yet somehow they were called "righteous" and "faithful". How was that so? It was because righteousness in the biblical sense meant being faithful to your promise, upholding your end of the contract, and doing whatever you had to do to preserve the relationship created by the contract. Abraham sinned—yes—but he promised to trust God and to do what God asked him to do—even if he did it badly. Jacob may have stolen the birthright, but he honored it, trusting God to care for him and his family in spite of his treachery, conniving, and his failure to treat his own children fairly, which led to his sons selling off Joseph to slave traders while claiming that he died at the hands of wild beasts. David confessed his sin and begged forgiveness when Nathan the prophet confronted him. And Rahab recognized the authority of the God of the Israelites to conquer the land of Canaan, even at the cost of her own people.

Are we righteous when we honor our contract to the government, to each other, and to God on this Christ the King Sunday? If not, maybe we should reconsider our actions. After all, today is a day of transition from one Church year to another. Today we celebrate a king. Next Sunday we begin looking again for a King, first in his Second Coming to judge the world in the season of Advent, then in the birth of a king at Christmas. We are preparing for a transition to a new government administration. In times of transition we have the chance to begin again, as it were, to start over. Hopefully it will be an opportunity to reflect on the year past—what we have accomplished, what we have learned, what we can do better. What will we do differently in this new administration? What have we learned from the mistakes of the past year and the past administration? How can we treat one another better? What is God calling us to as his children, as heirs of eternal grace, as a people forgiven for their sins? Are we repentant, eager to start anew, to do things better this year, or are we content with the way things are? Which brings me back to the question about contracts. Are we honoring our "contract" to the government, to each other, and to God?

Our *social* contract is not always clear, is it? In fact it's confusing because it's so many things to so many people—one thing to conservatives, another thing to liberals. It's one thing to whites, another thing to Blacks, and another thing to Latinos, to Native Americans, or to Asians. It's one thing to Christians, another thing to Jews, to Muslims, to Buddhists, to atheists, to Wiccans, or to Hindus. Our country is made up of all kinds of people, and it's hard to satisfy everyone. Like Abraham Lincoln said one time, "You can satisfy some of the people some of the time, but you can't satisfy all of the people all of the time." We live in the midst of a diversity of races, cultures, sexual orientations, abilities, and income levels, and finding unity in the midst of diversity is an awesome demand. I can assure you that it is not possible to satisfy our thirst for unity by eliminating those who are different, or by polarizing the populace into those who are right and those who are wrong. And it will not come by creating laws that give rights to one group and taking them away from another. If we claim

that God has endowed us with 'certain unalienable rights', that 'all men are created equal', and that we are 'one nation, under God, indivisible', then the responsibility falls on us to find a way to fulfill that contract, to live up to the relationship we have with one another regardless of whether we find it easy or not. Otherwise, in the words from our Gospel lesson for this Christ the King Sunday, we face the consequences of our king.

Perhaps the question needs to be "Who is our king?" To whom do we owe our righteousness? The people of Israel claimed God of Israel as their king. God, speaking through Isaiah, said, "...For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like me, (Isaiah 46:9)" and not a host of gods in heaven serving different groups of people or different regions of the earth. God established government according to Paul (Rom. 13:1-7), and although those governments are all different—Democratic, autocratic, plutocratic, communist, socialist, monarchy, and anarchy—God has established them all to maintain peace on the earth, to uphold the law, to punish the offender, and to bring justice. We don't agree on which system is the best in the world, but we know which system is best for us in the United States, and so we strive to support it as best we can. But government won't decide how we treat one another. That's up to us. How I treat you and how you treat me was supposed to be summed up in Jesus' words "Do to others as you would have them do to you" (Luke 6:31) or "But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also" (Matt. 5:39), but that's not always an easy thing to do, especially if you are the one who is suffering, if you are the one being hurt, if you are the one bearing the brunt of the injustice.

At the time that I am writing this message our country—our world—is in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic. Millions are infected, hundreds of thousands are hospitalized, businesses are going bankrupt, people are out of work, and governments are scrambling to save their economies. We are looking for a 'king' to solve our problems economically, medically, and socially, and the 'king' is asking us to wear masks, remain socially distant from one another, and to avoid touching our mouths and noses before we wash our hands for 20 seconds. Not everyone is heeding the call, and social unrest is on the rise. How should we respond as citizens and as Christians?

Our first response should be to say we need help. We can't do it alone. (We even have trouble doing it together!) Our best hope is to turn to those with whom we have contracts for assistance. To begin with, we are looking to our government to restore our economy, to find a cure, and to maintain order. Sadly, while the United States has the greatest wealth of any nation, we can't find a way to share our personal wealth with one another in our time of greatest opportunity. We expect the government to print more money and to pay our bills. Next, we can look to each other to care for our neighbors by wearing a mask in public, to stay indoors, learn indoors, and work indoors until this pandemic is passed. Sadly, however, many choose to demand their right to go without masks, expecting others to deliver food, clothing, furniture, and medicine at their own risk, and take the government to court when it infringe on "our rights". Finally, we can look to God to send a cure, to stop the violence and

injustice we perpetrate against each other, and to prosper our political point of view. Sadly, again, we don't want God to spoil our fun on vacation, to call us to repentance for social injustice, or to bear the taxes that make government bail-outs possible.

If our first response is to ask for help, then we need to let God help us the way we need it most—on the inside. We need help with our own sinful nature, and it begins with inviting Jesus Christ to be the Lord of our lives. We need to confess that we are in bondage to sin in ways that we cannot even begin to imagine, which explains why there is as much suffering as there is in the world. The contract began between us and God. Now God wants to help us keep our end of it because God knows we can't do it on our own. We never could fulfill all righteousness to government, one another, or to God.

God promised to help us by sending us a savior, a savior who would bear our suffering with us, not just take it away. He sent us a savior to break the power of sin that blinds us to our own shortcomings, our selfishness, our greed, and our narcissistic attitudes so that we could admit our need for God and embrace the faith he bestows as a gift. He sent a savior to pay the price for our sin so that we could lay the punishment for offenses against us on him instead of on one another. And he invited us to yield ourselves to the power of his Holy Spirit so that we could serve God.

Ah, but there's a catch. (There always is, isn't there?!) There's nothing that God needs from us. We can't do anything for God that God can't do for himself. Shocked? Stay with me here! While we make Jesus Christ the Lord of our lives through faith in his redemption of our lives from sin on the cross, while we must humble ourselves and submit to his will for our lives, while we seek his will through prayer, worship, and studying his promises in the Bible, there is something God expects of us. We can love one another as he has loved us (Jn. 13:34). We can have a relationship with the people that God has created and put into our lives. What does that accomplish? "And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'" (Matt. 25:40) Plain and simple, there's the contract. To be righteous with God means to be righteous with one another.

Caring for one another doesn't mean giving away everything you own to the poor. Caring for one another doesn't mean let the world walk all over you. And caring for one another doesn't mean taking over people's lives when they can't seem to take care of themselves. What it means is that we protect the relationship we have with them in the same way we protect our relationship with God. In other words, your relationship with God won't grow unless you are doing your best to grow your relationship with your family, your neighbor, your community, your country, and your world. Loving them does not mean loving their sin, but it does mean joining with them in their fight against sin, and doing it with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Christ is King, and you are Christ the King's ambassador. You aren't here to run everyone's life, but you are here to help them know the love of God through your deeds, your words, your accompaniment, and if need be, through your suffering. You know what God has done for you—what God is doing for you—and now you are bringing that Good News to those around you because those are the people to whom God is sending to you. You support the government that God has established when you vote to care for all the citizens of this country, not just for those who are like you or who agree with you or who you want to be like. You support the government when you uphold just laws, when you pay your fair share of taxes from the blessings God has bestowed on you, and when agree to abide by the vote of the majority. In each these instances you are doing it unto God, and that's the way God is going to evaluate your righteousness towards the contract between God and you.

Finally, you are not accountable for the sins of others, but you are accountable for your failure to care about what sin does to others. Indeed, as God's ambassador you are also God instrument to redeem the world from sin. I have heard that the Jews say our purpose in the world is to heal the world, and we cannot do that unless we recognize that we have a relationship with the world. Such a burden would be too great for us to attempt if it were not for God's promise to uphold his part of the contract, to be with us always, even to the end of the world (Matt. 28:19-20). God's contract with us is that we are never alone, and as long as sin is in the world we will never be without something to do. So let us embrace Christ as our King, rejoicing that he has made us his people through the blood of the everlasting contract, until that day when he receives us into his eternal presence with the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your master." (Matt. 25:21b) Amen

And the peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord, unto life everlasting.

Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

Open to the gifts of the Holy Spirit, we pray for the church, the world, and all of God's creation.

Jesus you are our Savior, the King of Kings, and Lord of Lords. Thank you for banishing darkness with light, erupting through loneliness with hope, and destroying death with life everlasting. Lord In Your Mercy.

Hear our Prayer.

Master of the Universe, as this church year comes to an end we pray that you bless us with patience, endurance, and faithfulness for the year and challenges that lay ahead. Remind us, when the road seems long and the burden seems heavy, that we can do all things through Jesus Christ who strengthens us. Lord In Your Mercy.

Hear our Prayer.

Almighty and ever-living God, you deal in hope and wholeness, in life and serenity. We pray that your spirit of solace enshroud all those who long, all who suffer, and all who need you in any way. Rain your grace and mercy down on all those in need. Be with all those we name before you now, both silently and aloud. Lord In Your Mercy.

Hear our Prayer.

Trusting in your mercy and goodness, we bring before you these prayers and whatever else you see that we need, in the name of the one who sets us free, Jesus Christ, our Savior.

Amen.

Thanksgiving for the Word

We bless you, God of hope, for your holy Word that endures forever. Your Word has inspired the faithful saints before us, among us, and beyond us to proclaim your glory. For your everlasting Word, O God, **we give you thanks and praise!**

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Jesus is your Word present from the beginning of all time; in all time; for all time. Through your Word of Jesus, O God, **hold us close as you send us to proclaim your justice and peace in the world!**

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and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
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and the power, and the glory,
forever and ever.

Amen.

Closing Prayer

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Amen.
