

Sunday, September 20, 2020

Parking Lot Worship Services: Sundays, 8:45 a.m. at Trinity and 10:15 at St. John's – Weather permitting. We will hold services in our church parking lot. You may sit in your cars or bring a lawn chair.

Iowa Lutheran Disaster Response Fund: If you would like to help those who suffered from the wind storm you may give to our Iowa domestic disaster relief fund by giving to the church and designating it to this fund. The church will forward it to the synod office who is working with The Iowa Lutheran Disaster Response Fund in a partnership with LSI and the three Iowa synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Introduction to the 16th Sunday After Pentecost

Matthew narrates one of Jesus' controversial parables in which Jesus says that the reign of God is like that of a landowner who pays his workers the same wage no matter what time of day they began to work. When God changes God's mind about punishing Nineveh for their evil ways, Jonah is angry. Yet God is gracious and merciful, abounding in steadfast love. In baptism we receive the grace of God that is freely given to all. As Martin Luther wrote, in the presence of God's mercy we are all beggars.

Greeting

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Prayer of the Day

Almighty and eternal God, you show perpetual lovingkindness to us your servants. Because we cannot rely on our own abilities, grant us your merciful judgment, and train us to embody the generosity of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

First Reading: Jonah 3:10--4:11

After Jonah's short sermon in 3:4, the Ninevites all repented and God decided to spare the city. Jonah objected to this and became even more angry when God ordered a worm to destroy a plant that was providing shade. The book ends with a question that challenges any who are not ready to forgive: You, Jonah, are all worked up about a bush, but shouldn't I be concerned about a hundred and twenty thousand Ninevites?

When God saw what [the people of Ninevah] did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it.

But this was very displeasing to Jonah, and he became angry. He prayed to the Lord and said, "O Lord! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing. And now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live." And the Lord said, "Is it right for you to be angry?" Then Jonah went out of the city and sat down east of the city, and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, waiting to see what would become of the city.

The Lord God appointed a bush, and made it come up over Jonah, to give shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort; so Jonah was very happy about the bush. But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the bush, so that it withered. When the sun rose, God prepared a sultry east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint and asked that he might die. He said, "It is better for me to die than to live."

But God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the bush?" And he said, "Yes, angry enough to die." Then the Lord said, "You are concerned about the bush, for which you did not labor and which you did not grow; it came into being in a night and perished in a night. And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals?"

Psalm 145:1-8

I will exalt you, my God and king,
and bless your name forever and ever.
Every day will I bless you
and praise your name forever and ever.
Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised!
There is no end to your greatness.
One generation shall praise your works to another
and shall declare your power.
I will speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty
and all your marvelous works.
They shall tell of the might of your wondrous acts,
and I will recount your greatness.
They shall publish the remembrance of your great goodness;
they shall sing joyfully of your righteousness.
The Lord is gracious and full of compassion,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

Second Reading: Philippians 1:21-30

Paul writes to the Philippians from prison. Though he is uncertain about the outcome of his imprisonment, he is committed to the ministry of the gospel and calls on the Philippians to live lives that reflect and enhance the gospel mission.

For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which I prefer. I am hard pressed between the two: my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better; but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you. Since I am convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with all of you for your progress and joy in faith, so that I may share abundantly in your boasting in Christ Jesus when I come to you again.

Only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel, and are in no way intimidated by your opponents. For them this is evidence of their destruction, but of your salvation. And this is God's doing. For he has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well—since you are having the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

Gospel: Matthew 20:1-16

Jesus tells a parable about God's generosity, challenging the common assumption that God rewards people according to what they have earned or deserve.

[Jesus said to the disciples:] "The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the laborers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. When he went out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace; and he said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.' So they went. When he went out again about noon and about three o'clock, he did the same. And about five o'clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, 'Why are you standing here idle all day?' They said to him, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard.' When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, 'Call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going

to the first.’ When those hired about five o’clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, saying, ‘These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.’ But he replied to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?’ So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

Message

Jonah was given a simple mission, “Go and tell the people Nineveh that they will be destroyed.” But he didn’t want to so he ran away and swallowed by a big fish and in its belly, he reluctantly gives in to God’s call.

What was Jonah’s problem? He had a clear call from God. Don’t we wish that just once God would tell us straight out what we should do? Jonah’s message was clear and simple, tell the people of Nineveh, “Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be destroyed.” A simple message of doom for ones’ enemy.

Nineveh was the historical enemy of Israel. God called it a wicked city and called for its destruction. Jonah was only the messenger. Jonah was called to do only one thing, deliver a message, but as we all know he ran the opposite direction. WHY? Nineveh was his enemy. Why did Jonah run away from his calling?

Why? Because he was afraid that the people of Nineveh would repent and worse than that, that God would change God’s mind and not destroy them. Why would he think such a thing? Because, Jonah already knew what God was like.

Here is a side note. If Jonah had lived during the time of Jesus, he would have recognized Jesus right off the bat. Why? Because Jonah, like most of us, already know that God is a merciful god, but how did Jonah know this? Israel was God’s chosen people. They believed that they were favored and loved by God above everyone else. What is the one thing we want more than anything else in the world than to be loved, wanted, protected, safe. We want love even more than money and power. Unfortunately, too often we confuse the two and we believe that if we were wealthy, or powerful, that we could buy whatever we wanted and be satisfied and safe.

In this story Jonah represents Israel. Jonah believed that God was on Israel’s side and Johan didn’t want anyone else to have a part of God. But Israel’s mission was to bring the light of God to all people? Why did Jesus call his disciples? What are we about as Christians? What is our calling, but to share the light of God with all people? Why didn’t Jonah want to go to Nineveh? He was afraid that God would forgive them like God had forgiven Israel, and that he would have to share God’s mercy with his enemy.

That in itself is not so bad, but what was Jonah real problem? Have you ever heard the line, “Mother loved you best?” Its jealousy, the fear of losing your favored position to someone else. For what purpose did Jesus call his disciples, you, and me, but to tell all people that God loves them too or, as we teach our children in the song this little light of mine. What does it mean to let our light shine? It means to be the love of God in this world to all people, including our enemies.

Why is that so important? The lack of love can kill us. God is our natural resource of love, like the sun that produces more energy than we could ever use, God produces love. But, unless we believe, use, and harness this love we suffer. The problem is, when we find food, gold, or even love, what do we do with it? We hoard it, hold on to it and never let go of it and when God comes along and says, “Go tell your enemy that I will destroy them,” the only reason we wouldn’t is that we are afraid that they might repent and that God might not destroy them and that we might have to share the love of God with them.

Did you ever stop to think that God has enough love for everyone? Ourselves, our spouses and children and Republicans and Democrats alike, or even our worst enemy? Did you ever think that God loves bad people too? Our call from God, our mission is simple. As Jesus said, "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." John 15:12

And let us not forget, "Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us." We can only feel forgiven and loved when we forgive and love one another. Our mission, our call from God is simple, be a light unto the world and love one another as Jesus loves us.

Prayers of Intercession

Drawn together in the compassion of God, we pray for the church, the world, and all those in need.

Generous God, you make the last first, and the first last. Where this gospel challenges the church, equip it for its works of service. Strengthen those who suffer for Christ. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Sun and wind, bushes and worms, cattle and great cities—nothing in creation is outside your concern, mighty God. In your mercy, tend to it all. Give us a spirit of generosity toward all you have made. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Where we find envy and create enemies, you provide enough for all. Bring peace to places of conflict and violence. Inspire leaders with creativity and wisdom. Bless the work of negotiators, peacekeepers, and development workers. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Reveal yourself to all in need as you are gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, ready to relent from punishing. Accompany judges and lawyers, victims of crime and those serving sentences. Give fruitful labor and a livelihood to those seeking work. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Even beyond our expectations, you choose to give generously. Grant life, health, and courage to all who are in need especially those who have suffered from wind, fire and hurricanes. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We praise you for the generations that have declared your power to us. Give us faithfulness to follow them, living for Christ, until you call us to join them in the joyful song around his throne. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

All these things and whatever else you see that we need, we entrust to your mercy; through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Offering Prayer

Blessed are you, O God, maker of all things. You have set before us these gifts of your good creation. Prepare us for your heavenly banquet, nourish us with this rich food and drink, and send us forth to set tables in the midst of a suffering world, through the bread of life, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

Blessing

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord's face shine on you with grace and mercy.

The Lord look upon you with favor and + give you peace. Amen.

Dismissal

Go in peace. Remember the poor. Thanks be to God.