

The Lutheran Church of the Covenant
“Reaching Out, Reflecting Christ, Renewing Lives”

**THE CHURCH: A SAFE PLACE FOR
EVERYONE**



Twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost
November 8, 2020



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.



We welcome you to worship here at the Lutheran Church of the Covenant! We continue to do our best in providing the safest environment possible for you to worship our Risen Lord with your whole heart, even during these COVID-19 times. Here are the precautions we are taking on behalf of our whole community of faith, so that we best care for one another and those we are around during the week.

- We ask you wear a mask the entire time you are in the building, unless you have a medical condition preventing you from doing so.
- Bulletins and individual Communion elements are available for you to pick up as you enter from the back of the sanctuary. The Communion elements are available in wine and grape juice form as well as wheat and gluten-free wafers. We will partake of the body and blood of Christ together from our respective seats.
- There will not be a separate time for an offering to be collected for supporting our congregational and wider-church ministry, and so an offering basket is placed beside the bulletins and Communion elements, for those who wish to give this day.
- We are asking you to refrain from singing, as we do our best to minimize the spread of droplets and aerosols around our masks. You may do so in your heart, where we believe God hears just as well as if spoken or sung aloud. We, also, ask that you continue participate throughout the worship by speaking the **bold** print, but doing so in a whisper voice.
- There will not be a time for sharing of the peace, but we encourage you to do so with one another before or after the worship (while maintaining the physical distancing recommendations of six feet).
- There will not be a processional or recessional of the cross, nor will there be a receiving line with the pastor after the worship. If you wish to speak for Pastor Brad, for any reason, please do not hesitate to contact him through email, text or calling him directly.

We thank you for your patience and understanding as we will always err on the side of caution for those with pre-existing health conditions and compromised immune systems.

Twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost

Today the prophet Amos calls for justice to roll down like waters. Paul urges us to encourage one another with the promised coming of the Lord. Jesus tells the parable of the wise and foolish bridesmaids. Surrounded by the faithful of every time and place, we celebrate Christ's coming in our midst in the word of life and the feast of victory—the marriage feast of the lamb.

Prelude *He Leadeth Me* (HOCKSTRA)

*Confession & Forgiveness

All may make the sign of the cross, the sign marked at baptism, as we take time to recognize our shortcomings, while also remembering God's relentless grace.

Blessed be the holy Trinity, † one God,
in whose image we are made,
who claims us and calls us beloved. **Amen.**

Silence is kept for reflection.

Holy One,
we confess that we are not faithful in using your gifts.
We forget the least of our siblings.
We do not see your beautiful image in one another.
We are infected by sin
that divides your beloved community.
Open our hearts to your coming,
open our eyes to see you in our neighbor,
open our hands to serve your creation. **Amen.**

Beloved, we are God's children,
and Jesus, our Beloved, opens the door to us.
Through † Jesus you are forgiven,
by Jesus you are welcome,
in Jesus you are called to rejoice!
Let us live in the promises prepared for us
from the foundation of the world. **Amen.**
Gathering Hymn *Blessed Assurance*

Text: Fanny J. Crosby, 1820-1915

- 1 Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!
Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine!
Heir of salvation, purchase of God,
born of his Spirit, washed in his blood.

Refrain

This is my story, this is my song,
praising my Savior, all the day long:
this is my story, this is my song,
praising my Savior all the day long.

- 2 Perfect submission, perfect delight,
visions of rapture now burst on my sight;
angels descending bring from above
echoes of mercy, whispers of love. *Refrain*

- 3 Perfect submission, all is at rest;
I in my Savior am happy and blest,
watching and waiting, looking above,
filled with his goodness, lost in his love. *Refrain*

Prayer of the Day

O God of justice and love, you illumine our way through life with the words of your Son. Give us the light we need, and awaken us to the needs of others, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

First Lesson

Amos 5:18-24

In the days of Amos, people thought that the day of the LORD would be a time of great victory, but Amos announced that it would be a day of darkness, not light. He said liturgy is no substitute for obedience. The LORD demands justice and righteousness in the community.

¹⁸Alas for you who desire the day of the LORD!
Why do you want the day of the LORD?

It is darkness, not light;
¹⁹as if someone fled from a lion,
and was met by a bear;
or went into the house and rested a hand against the wall,
and was bitten by a snake.

²⁰Is not the day of the LORD darkness, not light,
and gloom with no brightness in it?

²¹I hate, I despise your festivals,
and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.

²²Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings,
I will not accept them;
and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals
I will not look upon.

²³Take away from me the noise of your songs;
I will not listen to the melody of your harps.

²⁴But let justice roll down like waters,
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

Word of God, word of life.

Thanks be to God.

Psalm

Psalm 70

¹Be pleased, O God, to deliver me;
O Lord, make haste to help me.

²Let those who seek my life be put to shame and confounded;
let those who take pleasure in my misfortune draw back and be disgraced.

³Let those who say to me “Aha!” and gloat over me
turn back because of their shame.

⁴Let all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you;
let those who love your salvation say forever, “Great is the Lord!”

⁵But as for me, I am poor and needy; come to me quickly, O God.
You are my helper and my deliverer; O Lord, do not tarry.

Second Lesson

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Some of the Thessalonians are worried that dead Christians will be excluded from the resurrection to eternal life when Christ comes again. Paul reassures them with the word

of hope that all Christians, living or dead, will be raised into everlasting life with Christ.

¹³We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. ¹⁴For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died. ¹⁵For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died. ¹⁶For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever. ¹⁸Therefore encourage one another with these words.

Word of God, word of life.

Thanks be to God.

*Gospel

Matthew 25:1-13

Jesus tells a parable about his own second coming, emphasizing the need for readiness at all times.

[Jesus said to the disciples:] ¹“Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. ²Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. ³When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; ⁴but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. ⁵As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. ⁶But at midnight there was a shout, ‘Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’ ⁷Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. ⁸The foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ ⁹But the wise replied, ‘No! there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.’ ¹⁰And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut. ¹¹Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open to us.’ ¹²But he replied, ‘Truly I tell you, I do not know you.’ ¹³Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.”

This is the holy Gospel of our Lord.

Praise to you, o Christ.

Sermon

Hymn of the Day *The Church's One Foundation*

#654

Text: Samuel J. Stone, 1839-1900

- 1 The church's one foundation
is Jesus Christ, her Lord;
she is his new creation
by water and the word.
From heav'n he came and sought her
to be his holy bride;
with his own blood he bought her,
and for her life he died.

- 2 Elect from ev'ry nation,
yet one o'er all the earth,
her charter of salvation
one Lord, one faith, one birth:
one holy name she blesses,
partakes one holy food,
and to one hope she presses,
with ev'ry grace endued.

- 3 Though with a scornful wonder
this world sees her oppressed,
by schisms rent asunder,
by heresies distressed,
yet saints their watch are keeping;
their cry goes up: "How long?"
And soon the night of weeping
shall be the morn of song.

- 4 Through toil and tribulation
and tumult of her war,
she waits the consummation
of peace forevermore;
till with the vision glorious

her longing eyes are blest,
and the great church victorious
shall be the church at rest.

- 5 Yet she on earth has union
with God, the Three in One,
and mystic sweet communion
with those whose rest is won.
Oh, blessed heav'nly chorus!
Lord, save us by your grace,
that we, like saints before us,
may see you face to face.

*Prayers of Intercession

Longing for Christ's reign to come among us, we pray for God's power to come upon the church, the world, and all in need, responding to each petition with words from today's psalm, "O Lord, make haste to help us."

A brief silence.

Holy God, rouse us to prayer and praise, both when we gather for worship and when we cannot. Sustain all those who help us to worship at this time. Be pleased, O God, to deliver us. **O Lord, make haste to help us.**

Holy Creator, delight us with the autumn beauty of your earth. At this change of seasons, give the animals what they need for survival. Be pleased, O God, to deliver us. **O Lord, make haste to help us.**

Holy Peacemaker, give peace to our conflicted nation. Quell all attempts at violence and halt the desire for retribution. Cure our nation from prejudice of every kind. Teach us how to abide together as one diverse people. Restore families and friendships torn apart by political differences. Be pleased, O God, to deliver us. **O Lord, make haste to help us.**

Holy Sovereign, grant that all newly elected officials of government will work faithfully for the common good. Give them wisdom, honesty, and humility. Illumine their convictions with a spirit of cooperation. Be pleased, O God, to deliver us. **O Lord, make haste to help us.**

Holy Protector, bless the observance of Veterans Day. Bring armistice to areas of conflict and keep safe the military who serve in harm's way. Give to all the armed forces a dedication to defend the common good. Heal the wounds, both physical and emotional, experienced by active and retired service members. Be pleased, O God, to deliver us. **O Lord, make haste to help us.**

Holy Healer, bring health and wholeness to those who are sick, those who live with chronic pain, and the thousands who daily contract COVID-19. Console those who feel lonely or abandoned. Protect those living in resettlement camps. Uphold medical care workers, especially in third-world countries. Be pleased, O God, to deliver us. **O Lord, make haste to help us.**

Holy and immortal One, we remember before you all who have died in the faith. At the end, bring us with them to be with our Lord forever. Be pleased, O God, to deliver us. **O Lord, make haste to help us.**

Receive these prayers for the name of him who lived, died, and rose for us, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

*Thanksgiving at the Table

Holy God, holy and mighty, holy and immortal:
surrounded by evil and bordered by death
we appeal to you,
our Sovereign, our Wisdom, and our Judge.

We praise you for Christ, who proclaimed your reign of peace
and promised an end to injustice and harm.

In the night in which he was betrayed,
our Lord Jesus took bread, and gave thanks;
broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying:
Take and eat; this is my body, given for you.
Do this for the remembrance of me.
Again, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks,
and gave it for all to drink, saying:
This cup is the new covenant in my blood,
shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin.
Do this for the remembrance of me.

Remembering, therefore,
the sacrifice of his life and death
and the victory of his resurrection,
we await with all the saints
his loving redemption of our suffering world.

Holy Spirit, bless these gifts of bread and wine
and all who share in the body and blood of your Son:
teach us your mercy and justice,
and make all things new in Christ.

Through him all glory and honor is yours,
Almighty Father, with the Holy Spirit,
both now and forever. **Amen.**

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those
who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours,
now and forever. Amen.**

Communion

Music Interlude *Pastorale on "Blessed Assurance"* (LAU)
Please use this time to meditate or pray for those dear to your heart.

Prayer after Communion

Lord Jesus,
in this simple meal you have set a banquet.

Sustain us on the journey,
strengthen us to care for the least of your beloved children,
and give us glad and generous hearts
as we meet you on the way. **Amen.**

Blessing

May the God of all creation,
in whose image we are made,
who claims us and calls us beloved,
who strengthens us for service,
give you reason to rejoice and be glad!
The blessing of God,
Sovereign, ✠ Savior, and Spirit,
be with you today and always. **Amen.**

Sending Hymn *Christ Is Made the Sure Foundation*

#645

Text: Isaac Watts, 1674-1748, alt.

- 1 O God, our help in ages past,
our hope for years to come,
our shelter from the stormy blast,
and our eternal home:
- 2 Under the shadow of your throne
your saints have dwelt secure;
sufficient is your arm alone,
and our defense is sure.
- 3 Before the hills in order stood
or earth received its frame,
from everlasting you are God,
to endless years the same.
- 4 A thousand ages in your sight
are like an evening gone,
short as the watch that ends the night

before the rising sun.

- 5 Time, like an ever-rolling stream,
bears all our years away;
they fly forgotten, as a dream
dies at the op'ning day.
- 6 O God, our help in ages past,
our hope for years to come,
still be our guard while troubles last
and our eternal home.

Dismissal
Beloved of God,
go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

Postlude *Recessional on "St. Anne"* (YOUNG)

Praying Together

... for those who are homebound, ill, hospitalized or recuperating: Gayle Agg, Bob Buettner, Alexis Carr, Joan Clarke, Steve Dobush, John Crawford, Nicole Crawford, Barbara Fossa, Carolyn Frajter, Ken Frajter, Nealie Gage, Barb Gaglione, Michelle Garnett, Rosa Garnett, Judy Jones, Dylan King, Jason Lanese, Andrea Lanzalaca, Sara Mendes, Phyllis Nemeth, Bernice Novak, Don Rusher Jr., Claudia Senderak, Arlene Stoltz, Marie Storms, Tim Susanek, Tom Susanek, Phyllis Treichel, Phyllis Welker, Linda Wright, Wilma Dancy, Bill Helmick, Nancy Helmick, Robert Lambrecht, Kim (Novak) Leonhardt, Laura Mele, Judy Morgan, Kris Sandor, Bill Wilkens, Eugene Winfrey, the Copeland/Lane Family

LAST WEEK

General Fund receipts for week ending 11/1/2020: \$1754

To the glory of God, and in loving memory of Frances Dobush, a memorial was given by Arlene Lasher.

To the glory of God, and in loving memory of George, Marion, Greta & Marge, a memorial was given by Barb Gaglione.



Bishop Abraham Allende, who served with Covenant from 2009-2014, will be retiring from his leadership role as our Bishop of the Northeastern Ohio Synod as well as full-time

ministry in general. An official retirement celebration, including worship with Holden Evening Prayer, will be held virtually next Sunday, November 15 at 4:30, and will be broadcasted through the Synod's YouTube channel (youtube.com/NEOSynod). As his Covenant family, we will be starting a collection to provide him a combined retirement gift: a gift certificate to one of his and Linda's favorite restaurants, Gervasi Vineyard & Winery in Canton. There is a separate basket at the back of the sanctuary for you to drop off your contribution, if you wish to do so. We will continue collecting until next Sunday, November 15. You may also drop off at the office during the week or mail it to the church. If you wish to do so through a check, please make the check out to Covenant with "Bishop Allende" in the memo line, so that we may do a single combined gift. If you wish to send him a card directly, please do so before December 1, at the Synod office:

Northeastern Ohio Synod (ELCA)
1890 Bailey Road
Cuyahoga Falls, OH 44221-5259

We pray God's blessings upon him and Linda to enjoy retirement together, and we thank him for his wonderful ministry here, throughout northeastern Ohio and beyond!



Our next semi-annual congregational meeting will be next Sunday, November 15, immediately after the worship in the sanctuary, as we focus on the budget for the upcoming fiscal year. We hope you can stay and join us for these important conversations about our shared ministry.

Lectionary Blog: On Being Ready

I'm not a good dinner party host. I used to love the idea of cooking lavish meals for guests, but I fall into the same pattern. I cook food so it will be ready about an hour after people are scheduled to arrive. Of course, in the meantime I offer appetizers and drinks. But people always come late, the food is ready before they arrive, and then it either gets cold or is overcooked. And, if I'm honest, I'm an early-to-bed, early-to-rise sort of guy, so I'm no fun at parties that last later than 9 p.m. I'm just terrible at being ready when people show up after I expected. Jesus has a series of parables aimed directly at people like me.

The parable of the 10 virgins comes in the middle of a series of “return parables.” In the previous chapter, Jesus spoke about a householder who wasn’t ready to encounter a thief in the night (Matthew 24:43). Then he told a parable about two slaves who had been put in charge of taking care of other slaves (Matthew 45-51). One fed and took care of his fellow slaves while the other abused them and squandered resources. When the master returned, the slave who had been doing the right thing the whole time was rewarded and promoted, while the abusive slave was cut into pieces and thrown in with the hypocrites. These parables were aimed at teaching Jesus’ community that they should be ever ready and consistent in their righteous behavior because we don’t know when he will return. The parable of the virgins is going to teach largely the same point.

We don’t hear of the tradition of young women waiting to escort a groom (and presumably his bride) into a feast from any source outside the Gospels. Nonetheless, Jesus presents the picture of women charged with lighting the way for a groom who has tarried late into the night. Without streetlights, and with the human labor that went into pressing oil for lamps, moonless nights were (and are) incredibly dark in much of the world. If there was to be an after-hours feast, several lights would be needed outside to ensure that the guests—especially the guests of honor—knew where to go. Ten young women were given the important responsibility of lighting the way for the groom.

The women prepared, lighting lamps and standing ready at the festive venue. As the evening wore on and the bridal party didn’t arrive, all 10 fell asleep (just like me at dinner parties that last too late!). The parable presents no condemnation for this. When the groom and his entourage finally arrived, the young women were awoken. They all trimmed their lamps, but some didn’t have sufficient oil to keep them lit at the crucial moment. The women who had thoughtfully prepared for the groom’s delay had just enough oil to light the way for him without any to spare for others. So the insufficiently prepared women ran to an all-night oil shop to buy more. Meanwhile, the late-night feast began.

When the young women returned with their restocked lamps, they found the doors shut and locked. Of course, there was no more need for their lamps. The party had moved indoors, everyone had arrived and the women had been found lacking at the crucial moment. When they pleaded to be allowed in, they were sent away because their voices weren’t recognized.

As always, context is incredibly important. In the coming weeks, we will see in the Gospel of Matthew that Jesus places profound importance on performing righteousness as a response to invitation into the kingdom of heaven. The parable of the 10 virgins is

interpreted many ways, to be sure, but the surrounding texts point to the necessity of righteous living for Jesus' people. On other occasions, Jesus used the same response that he gave to the insufficiently prepared women—"I do not know you" (Matthew 7:21-23)—to condemn those who call Jesus "Lord" but don't actually do the things that God has called them to do.

In the parable of the 10 virgins, Jesus is saying that obedience to Jesus is the lamp oil. We can have a little or we can have a lot. As always, we must remember that it's not the oil that throws the party—it's the groom. We don't save ourselves and we certainly can't impress God by means of our good works. At the same time, the Jesus of Scripture demands praxis rather than simply belief. Jesus is going to return, and we confess that he will come again to judge the living and the dead. More on that in a couple weeks. For now, let us cling to the good news that we are invited to the feast. The groom wants to make sure we do our jobs to light his way. And so Jesus, like a loving teacher, repeatedly instructs us in an important lesson: we must be always ready.



Cory Driver is a minister of word and service, and the director of the Transformational Leadership Academy in the Indiana-Kentucky Synod. He earned his doctorate in Jewish religious cultures from Emory University, Atlanta. Cory lives with his family in Indianapolis.

Inside a church

E X L S X N K Y L T B Z W C W L U H U A Z P E Z
F A R F A C P W O D N I W S S A L G N I A T S J
L N Q M K L G I A B W M E R B H Y L J P H A F M
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bible

bell

steeple

organ

font

stain glass window

candles

communion
table

hymn book

cross

pulpit

pews