

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

I am convinced that
NOTHING
can ever separate us
from God's **LOVE**

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost
July 26, 2020



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

As Solomon prays for wisdom, we seek to more deeply know the treasures of faith. In today's gospel Jesus offers everyday images that reveal to us the reign of God: a tree that becomes a sheltering home, yeast that penetrates and expands, a treasured pearl, a net that gains a great catch. Even as we seek the riches of God's reign, the great surprise is that God's grace finds us first!

Prelude *Whispering Hope* (Drennan)

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,
whose steadfast love is everlasting,
whose faithfulness endures from generation to generation.

Amen!

Trusting in the mercy of God, let us confess our sin.

Silence is kept for reflection.

Reconciling God,

**we confess that we do not trust your abundance,
and we deny your presence in our lives.**

**We place our hope in ourselves
and rely on our own efforts.**

We fail to believe that you provide enough for all.

We abuse your good creation for our own benefit.

**We fear difference and do not welcome others
as you have welcomed us.**

We sin in thought, word, and deed.

By your grace, forgive us;

through your love, renew us;

and, as the Holy Spirit, lead us;

so that we may live and serve you in newness of life. Amen!

Beloved of God,
 by the radical abundance of divine mercy
 we have peace with God through † Christ Jesus,
 through whom we have obtained grace upon grace.
 Our sins are forgiven.
 Let us live now in hope.
 For hope does not disappoint,
 because God's love has been poured into our hearts
 through the Holy Spirit. **Amen!**

Gathering Hymn *My Faith Looks Up to Thee* (PALMER, MASON)

#759



1 My faith looks up to thee, thou Lamb of Cal - va - ry,
 2 May thy rich grace im - part strength to my faint - ing heart,
 3 While life's dark maze I tread and griefs a - round me spread,
 4 When ends life's tran - sient dream, when death's cold, sul - len stream



Sav - ior di - vine! Now hear me while I pray, take all my
 my zeal in - spire; as thou hast died for me, oh, may my
 be thou my guide; bid dark-ness turn to day, wipe sor-row's
 shall o'er me roll; blest Sav - ior, then, in love fear and dis -



guilt a - way, oh, let me from this day be whol - ly thine!
 love to thee pure, warm, and change-less be, a liv - ing fire!
 tears a - way, nor let me ev - er stray from thee a - side.
 trust re-move; oh, bear me safe a - bove, a ran - somed soul!

Prayer of the Day

Beloved and sovereign God, through the death and resurrection of your Son you bring us into your kingdom of justice and mercy. As the Holy Spirit, give us your wisdom, that we may treasure the life that comes from Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen!**

First Lesson

1 Kings 3:5-12

Because Solomon did not ask for long life, riches, or the defeat of his enemies, God gave him what he asked for: wisdom to govern the people well.

⁵At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, “Ask what I should give you.” ⁶And Solomon said, “You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant my father David, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart toward you; and you have kept for him this great and steadfast love, and have given him a son to sit on his throne today. ⁷And now, O Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David, although I am only a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. ⁸And your servant is in the midst of the people whom you have chosen, a great people, so numerous they cannot be numbered or counted. ⁹Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil; for who can govern this your great people?”

¹⁰It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. ¹¹God said to him, “Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches, or for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, ¹²I now do according to your word. Indeed I give you a wise and discerning mind; no one like you has been before you and no one like you shall arise after you.”

The word of the Lord!

Thanks be to God!

Psalm

Psalm 119:129-136

¹²⁹Your decrees are wonderful;
therefore I obey them with all my heart.

¹³⁰**When your word is opened it gives light;
it gives understanding to the simple.**

¹³¹I open my mouth and pant
because I long for your commandments.

¹³²**Turn to me and be gracious to me,
as you always do to those who love your name.**

¹³³Order my footsteps in your word;
let no iniquity have dominion over me.

¹³⁴**Rescue me from those who oppress me,
and I will keep your commandments.**

¹³⁵Let your face shine upon your servant
and teach me your statutes.

¹³⁶**My eyes shed streams of tears,
because people do not keep your teaching.**

Second Lesson

Romans 8:26-39

These words celebrate the depth of God's actions for us. Through Christ's death for us and the activity of the Spirit praying for us, we are fused to God's love poured out in Jesus Christ. Nothing, not even death itself, is able to separate us from such incredible divine love.

²⁶The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. ²⁷And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

²⁸We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. ³⁰And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

³¹What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? ³²He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? ³³Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. ³⁵Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered."

³⁷No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The word of the Lord!

Thanks be to God!

Gospel

Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

Throughout Matthew's gospel, Jesus and his disciples proclaim the good news that "the kingdom of heaven is near!" Here, Jesus offers several brief parables that explore the implications of this announcement for people's lives.

The holy Gospel according to Matthew, the 13th chapter.

Glory to you, o Lord!

³¹[Jesus] put before [the crowds] another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field;³² it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches."

³³He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened."

⁴⁴"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

⁴⁵"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; ⁴⁶on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

⁴⁷"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; ⁴⁸when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. ⁴⁹So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous ⁵⁰and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

⁵¹"Have you understood all this?" They answered, "Yes." ⁵²And he said to them, "Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old."

This is the holy Gospel of our Lord!

Praise to you, O Christ!

Sermon

Hymn of the Day *Thine Is the Glory* (BUDRY, HOYLE, HANDEL)

#376



1 Thine is the glo - ry, ris - en, con-qu'ring Son; end - less is the
2 Lo, Je - sus meets thee, ris - en from the tomb! Lov - ing - ly he
3 No more we doubt thee, glo - rious Prince of life; life is naught with-



vic - t'ry thou o'er death hast won! An - gels in bright rai - ment
greet thee, scat - ters fear and gloom; let his church with glad - ness
out thee; aid us in our strife; make us more than con-qu'rors,



rolled the stone a - way, kept the fold - ed grave-clothes
hymns of tri - umph sing, for the Lord now liv - eth;
through thy death - less love; bring us safe through Jor - dan

Refrain



where thy bod - y lay.
death hath lost its sting! Thine is the glo - ry, ris - en, con-qu'ring
to thy home a - bove.



Son; end - less is the vic - t'ry thou o'er death hast won!

Apostles' Creed

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.**
**I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.**
**I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

Prayers of Intercession

Held in one body by the Holy Spirit, we pray for the church, the world, and all who are in need, responding to each petition with words from Psalm 119, "Be gracious to us."

A brief silence.

Open your life-giving word to all your precious childre. Reveal yourself to us in ways both traditional and surprising, in places old and new. Bless church leaders throughout the world, as they face their challenging tasks. Turn to us, O God: **be gracious to us.**

Give us the will to seek your wisdom. Guide the many churches in their uses of technology, and show us during this time ways to study your word. Turn to us, O God: **be gracious to us.**

Give to plants and animals the water and land they require. Form us into grateful and healing caretakers of your earth. Bless the efforts of scientists and researchers, especially those seeking a vaccine. Lead all people to honor the scientific discoveries that you grant to humankind. Turn to us, O God: **be gracious to us.**

Direct leaders of nations to build trust with each other and to resist the ways of violence. Stifle the lust for conquest. Bring peace to the Middle East. Watch over all the people of Hong Kong. Move us away from racist attitudes and policies. Form our national, state and local leaders to speak with honesty, to strive for justice, and to work to alleviate the nation's needs. Turn to us, O God: **be gracious to us.**

Heal the sick. Feed the hungry. House the refugee. Comfort the countless thousands who are dealing with the coronavirus. Accompany those living with anxiety and despair. Form us to be your arms of mercy. Turn to us, O God: **be gracious to us.**

Give to the youth of afflicted nations an inspiring dream of what their future might be. Give them patience to await a time of safety. Direct all schools from daycare through graduate school to find an acceptable way forward. Turn to us, O God: **be gracious to us.**

In gratitude for the lives of our beloved dead, we pray that nothing, neither death nor life, will separate us from your love. At the end, gather us with all your saints in light everlasting. Turn to us, O God: **be gracious to us.**

Into your hands, gracious God, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy; through Jesus Christ, our Savior. **Amen!**

Thanksgiving at the Table

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts!

We lift them to the Lord!

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God!

It is right to give our thanks and praise!

Holy God,
our Maker, Redeemer, and Healer,
in the harmonious world of your creation,
the plants and animals,
the seas and stars
were whole and well in your praise.

When sin had scarred the world,
you sent your Son to heal our ills
and to form us again into one.

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,
his acts of healing,
his body given up,
and his victory over death,
we await that day when all the peoples of the earth
will come to the river to enjoy the tree of life.

Holy Spirit, be immersed in this meal:
as grains scattered on the hillside become one bread,
so let your church be gathered from the ends of the earth,
that all may be fed with the Bread of life, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

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 *Savior More Than Life to Me* (Pethel)

(please use this time to meditate or pray for those dear to your heart)

Prayer after Communion

God of the welcome table,
in this meal we have feasted on your goodness
and have been united by your presence among us.
Empower us to go forth sustained by these gifts
so that we may share your neighborly love with all,
through Jesus Christ, the giver of abundant life. **Amen!**

Blessing

Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers,
nor things present, nor things to come,
nor powers, nor height, nor depth,
nor anything else in all creation,
will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.
God, the creator, ✠ Jesus, the Christ,
and the Holy Spirit, the comforter,
bless you and keep you in eternal love. **Amen!**



1 Sent forth by God's bless - ing, our true faith con - fess - ing,
 2 With praise and thanks - giv - ing to God ev - er - liv - ing,



the peo - ple of God from this dwell - ing take leave.
 the tasks of our ev - 'ry - day life we will face—



The sup - per is end - ed. Oh, now be ex - tend - ed
 our faith ev - er shar - ing, in love ev - er car - ing,



the fruits of this ser - vice in all who be - lieve.
 em - brac - ing God's chil - dren, the whole hu - man race.



The seed of Christ's teach - ing, re - cep - tive souls
 With your feast you feed us, with your light now



reach - ing, shall blos - som in ac - tion for God and for all.
 lead us; u - nite us as one in this life that we share.



Your grace shall in - cite us, your love shall u - nite us
 Then may all the liv - ing with praise and thanks - giv - ing



to work for your king - dom and an - swer your call.
 give hon - or to Christ and his name that we bear.

Dismissal

Go in peace. Christ is with you!

Thanks be to God!

Postlude *The Ash Grove* (Organ)

Praying Together

... for those who are homebound, ill, hospitalized or recuperating: Gayle Agg, Bob Buettner, Alexis Carr, Joan Clarke, Steve Dobush, Barbara Fossa, Carolyn Frajter, Ken Frajter, Nealie Gage, Barb Gaglione, Michelle Garnett, Rosa Garnett, Alex Hohenstein, Judy Jones, Tom Juhasz, Ralph Kane, Dylan King, Jason Lanese, Andrea Lanzalaca, Sara Mendes, Phyllis Nemeth, Bernice Novak, Don Rusher Jr., Norm Schuette, Arlene Stoltz, 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 7/19/2020: \$1424.00

Lectionary Blog: Discerning the Parables



It's parable Sunday! This week we read five short parables all about the kingdom of heaven. What is God's kingdom like? What does it do? How is it unlike other kingdoms? Jesus answers all of these questions—but does so indirectly by giving similes to describe what the kingdom is like. If we are wise, we approach these parables carefully and

respectfully, recognizing that they were difficult to understand even for those who studied with Jesus full time and lived immersed in the context in which he taught (Matthew 13:24-36). We should seek to imitate King Solomon, who asked God for discernment (from the root בָּיַן “to distinguish [between]”), in order for the Spirit to guide us in understanding Jesus' parables about the kingdom.

First, Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a mustard seed and yeast (Matthew 13:31-33). These two images are powerful because they have small beginnings but have quick takeover potential. Mustard plants never become tall or impressive trees like the mighty cedars (even if they do provide habitats for birds). The shrub stays low/humble and reproduces quickly. In fact, the plants reproduce so quickly that the sages banned the planting of mustard because it would quickly spread and contaminate other fields (M. *Kilayim* 3:2).

The kingdom of heaven is also like yeast that a woman hid in three measures (probably an overwhelming 40ish liters/10ish gallons) of flour. The yeast leavens the whole batch. In other words, Jesus is saying that the kingdom is small and modest. It works not by making grand displays or being impressive, but by spreading uncontrollably.

Then Jesus says the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. A man finds it, but instead of stealing the treasure, he reburies it. Then he joyfully sells everything he has to legally acquire the field and the treasure therein (Matthew 13:44). In so saying, Jesus describes humans' different interests in the kingdom of heaven. One person happens upon the treasure by chance, and he decides to sell everything else in his life to joyously invest in the whole field that contains the treasure. Implicit in this description is another human who owns the field but has no knowledge or care for the treasure contained within. This person gives up the field and the right to the treasure within. With Jesus' postscript about people who cherish the law *and* the kingdom of heaven being like masters who have old *and* new treasures (Matthew 13:51-52), we can deduce that the field in this parable stands for Scripture, in which the promise of the kingdom waits to be discovered.

The last two parables move the subject from humans to the kingdom itself. The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant searching for fine pearls. When the merchant finds a precious pearl, he sells all that he has and buys it (Matthew 13:45-46). Like the human in the previous parable, the kingdom, embodied by Jesus, is also willing to give up everything else to acquire its/his goal—humankind as a pearl of great value. We must pay attention to the reversal in agency here. The kingdom of heaven is *not* the pearl—it is the merchant. Jesus is teaching about the lengths that he will go to rescue humans from sin and death. He will give up everything and empty himself (Philippians 2:7)—as a good shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep (John 10:11).

Jesus' last parable for this week says the kingdom is like a dragnet that is tossed into the sea and then pulled to the shore, indiscriminately catching everything in its path (Matthew 13:47-48). This image is comforting to me in troubling moments in history. Eventually God's reign of love and justice will capture us all up in it, inescapably. In describing the sorting of the fish that the net catches, Jesus presents another example of an eschatological selection based on what kind of fruit we produce—evil or righteousness (Matthew 13:48-50).

Jesus painted for his discerning listeners several images of what his kingdom is like. The kingdom spreads quickly like mustard and yeast. The kingdom is exciting good news to some and not of interest to others, like a field with hidden treasure. The Prince of the kingdom is excited about acquiring his goal—us—and willing to give up everything to purchase us from sin and death. And then lastly, the kingdom comes with a promise of eventual judgment, again based on what kind of fruit—or in this case, fish—we produce. This is all good news, to which we say: “Your kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven!”



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.

This, and other resources for the journey of faith, available at LivingLutheran.org, as well as our own website: covenantmaplehts.org.

Parables of Jesus

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

Great Banquet

Growing Seed

Sheep and Goats

Sower and the Soils

Weeds

Valuable
Pearl

Net

Wise and Foolish Builders

Mustard Seed

Fig Tree

Friend in Need

Lost Son

Rich Fool

Two sons

Lost Sheep

Lost Coin