

Sunday, August 30, 2020

From Pastor Stephen, Zion Lutheran Church, Pembroke, ON

Welcome: A warm welcome to all who worship with us this week. Lifted up on the cross, our Lord draws us to himself in mercy and compassion. We proudly wear the cross on our foreheads and proclaim that, through Christ's cross, we will also share his resurrection as a holy and precious gift of grace.

We sing our **Gathering Song:** ELW 817 You Have Come Down to the Lakeshore

Greeting: The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. **And also with you.**

Prayer of the Day: Gracious God, help us to always see that your way of the cross is our path of life, which brings hope and faith out of death and despair. As you draw us to yourself through the holy cross, fill us with joy in the victory you have won through the death and resurrection of your son, our Lord Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Hymn: ELW 810 O Jesus, I Have Promised

First Reading: Jeremiah 15: 19 - 21

A reading from Jeremiah.

Therefore thus says the Lord: If you turn back, I will take you back, and you shall stand before me. If you utter what is precious, and not what is worthless, you shall serve as my mouth. It is they who will turn to you, not you who will turn to them.

And I will make you to this people a fortified wall of bronze; they will fight against you, but they shall not prevail over you, for I am with you to save you and deliver you, says the Lord.

I will deliver you out of the hand of the wicked, and redeem you from the grasp of the ruthless.

Word of God, word of life. **Thanks be to God.**

Psalm 16: Path of Life

Second Reading: Romans 12: 9 - 18

A reading from Romans.

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are.

Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

Word of God, word of life. **Thanks be to God.**

Gospel: Matthew 16: 21 - 28

The holy gospel according to Matthew. **Glory to you, O Lord.**

From that time on after Peter confessed that Jesus was the Messiah, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.

And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.” But he turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

Then Jesus told his disciples, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?”

“For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.”

The gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, O Christ.**

Homily: We receive a flurry of advice from Saint Paul’s letter to the Romans today: Serve the Lord, rejoice in hope, persevere in prayer, extend hospitality to strangers, rejoice in hope, do not lag in zeal, live in harmony ...and the list goes on. It almost sounds like a collection of bumper sticker sayings gathered from a Church parking lot.

We could wonder why Saint Paul is giving us this long list of Christian behaviours. Is he giving us a whole new list of laws or rules to live by and follow? This would be odd indeed, for Saint Paul so often spoke of how the gospel, the Good News of Christ, freed us up from living by laws, commands and rules.

Perhaps what Saint Paul is doing is giving us a list of what happens when we do endeavour to live by grace and gospel, in response to God's goodness and loving-kindness in our lives.

Notice that what Saint Paul's says is thoroughly grounded in reality. For instance, he knows that just because you are a Christian it does not mean that you will always live in peace. Some things are beyond our ability to control or change. St. Paul writes: "As long as it depends on you, live peaceably with all." He rather intelligently notes that we will not, simply by our own words and actions, be able to bring peace into all situations of hatred and distrust; but we can keep from escalating them by our responses to them. If nothing else, he notes, our kindness and generosity of spirit may move some to repentance - making some rethink their behaviours in light of the kindness and grace we have shown to them and others. As one sarcastic soul once said, you can always tell who the Christians are - they are the ones bruised by turning the other cheek, and the ones who are naked because they gave their coat to the person who stole their shirt. Let's face it, living by grace, carrying the cross of Christ, makes us very vulnerable.

Saint Paul addresses a touchy subject in his Letter to the Romans as he speaks of how Christians are to treat their enemies, because he is not so gullible as to believe that Christians will not have enemies. His advice is simple: "If your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink." This is a long way from the Old Testament's an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. It sounds a whole lot like giving aid and comfort to the enemy, which in some countries can get you executed.

Showing compassion to those who hate us goes back to the cross of Christ that we carry, where Christ forgave those who crucified him. It is at the heart of Christianity – at the very heart of living

the Gospel. It is also incredibly difficult work to live by the grace we have seen in the cross of Christ and Lord...and to pick up that cross and carry it boldly through life.

How much easier it would be to live by the old Testament rules and laws. How gratifying it would be to righteously punish our enemies and to see those who make our lives miserable suffer for their actions. It satisfies a need for revenge; but it is not Christ's way, nor is it our path of life as followers of Christ.

Often, Christians look to the Old Testament for support when we do not want to live the gospel. You can find, in the Old Testament, support for just about every prejudice and hatred if you looked hard enough, not to mention more than a few acts of vicious revenge to emulate. When we are uncomfortable with the Gospel of Christ, the Old Testament becomes a religious weapon we can use because it allows us to justify some of our most cherished hatreds and prejudices...especially if you read the Old Testament only in parts and not as a whole. Sometimes, our best reaction to what is said in some of the Old Testament is to say: "Thank God, in Christ, things are no longer that way among us."

We are called to be faithful to Christ and his Gospel. Sometimes, the brutality and anger expressed in the Old Testament will chase us to Christ and his compassionate, merciful, grace-filled ways. Luther said that the law in the Bible, even the commandments, would chase us to Christ...actually, he said that was the law's only purpose.

How difficult it is to put the old ways aside and pick up the cross and follow Christ. When you pick up the cross of Christ, you leave behind all possibilities for revenge, arrogance or self-righteous anger.

While there is much joy in being a servant of Christ, there is also suffering at the hands of those hostile to Christ and his cross and to the Gospel itself. We delude and deceive ourselves if we think that Christianity is easy and simple. Even St. Peter, the rock upon which Christ built his Church, struggles with the life Christ calls us to live as we share Christ's life.

Even so, we live by God's grace and not by our ability to live the Gospel or carry Christ's cross in this world. May God bless us and strengthen us as we endeavour to live the Good News and give us joy as we live in that grace. **Amen.**

Hymn: ELW 808 Lord Jesus, You Shall Be My Song

Prayers of the Faithful: Heavenly Father, your son chose the way of the cross to show us the path from death to life. May we ever rejoice in Christ's cross, source of our hope and assurance of your compassion and love. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for the leaders of our nation and those who aspire to lead, that they may be guided to serve as compassionate and intelligent servants of your people. Grant them wisdom, courage and compassion. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for nations that are struggling and in chaos. Bring peace with justice in troubled lands. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for all who are recovering from surgery or a time of illness: Erin Dupuis, Alison Kellough, Hilda Klawitter, Kris Purdy, Joyce Scheuneman, Joyce Schleen, Murray Schutt, and Gerry Vandersleen, and all in need of healing. Hold them in your mercy. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of gentleness, we pray for all who struggle with mental illness, made more difficult by this time of isolation and anxiety. Help us care for those who are struggling, grant us patient and understanding hearts and minds. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for all who are working on vaccines and treatments during the pandemic and for all who care for those struggling with the virus. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Watch over our loved ones who cannot be with us in these days of physical distancing. We long for the times when we can be together again. Until then, bind our hearts together in the love of Christ, and make us one in him. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

All these things, and whatever else you see that we need, grant us, gracious God.

Gathering all our prayers into one, we pray the prayer that you have taught us:

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.**

Blessing: May our Gracious God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, bless us and keep us in the Risen Life of Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Sending Song: ELW 767 Lord, Take My Hand and Lead Me

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

PLEASE NOTE: There will be no taped service or bulletins printed for September 6th, 2020. We look forward to seeing you in church on September 13th at 10:00 a.m. or September 16th at 10:30 a.m. for Quiet Communion.

CLWR Kits for Children

Once again members of the Social Ministry Committee will be gathering items for Canadian Lutheran World Relief's "We Care" Children's Learning and Living Kits. The kits are distributed to children in refugee camps and remote villages around the world. Kits, kit items and donations will be collected, as in past years, in November. Many of the items in the kit are school supplies. Here is the list of kit items for members wishing to take advantage of the "Back to School" sales in late summer:

- 3 lined notebooks
- 10 unsharpened pencils with erasers
- 1 metric ruler (30 cm), 1 pencil sharpener and 1 eraser
- 1 pack of crayons (or pencil crayons)
- 1 small and simple toy (new and not requiring batteries, examples: doll, truck, ball, stuffed toy)
- 1 bar of soap and 1 toothbrush (new and wrapped)
- 1 tube of toothpaste (expiration date no earlier than one year)

*** Please wait until November to hand in your kit items.

These kits make a real difference in the lives of children. Last year, thanks to the generosity of Zion members, 119 kits were completed. Since 2002 we have shipped 1437 Learning and Living Kits to CLWR. You can read more about the "We Care" program at www.clwr.org.

**With Canadian Lutheran World Relief, we are
"Celebrating God as We Serve Others"**