

Sunday, July 19, 2020

From Pastor Stephen, Zion Lutheran Church, Pembroke, ON

Welcome: A warm welcome to all who have joined us for worship this morning. We hear words of wisdom from Solomon and the Gospel of Matthew calling us to always remember that God is merciful and that God cares for all people, even those we may judge to be unfaithful or unworthy.

We sing our **Gathering Song:** ELW 508 As Rain From the Clouds

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.**

Let us pray: Tender-hearted God, you care for your children with compassion and gentleness. By your Spirit give us wisdom and help us walk on your path of life with faith and joy. **Amen.**

Hymn of Praise: ELW 824 This is My Father's World

First Reading: Wisdom 12: 13, 16 - 19

A reading from the Wisdom of Solomon.

For neither is there any god besides you, whose care is for all people, to whom you should prove that you have not judged unjustly.

For your strength is the source of righteousness, and your sovereignty over all causes you to spare all. For you show your strength when people doubt the completeness of your power, and you rebuke any insolence among those who know it.

Although you are sovereign in strength, you judge with mildness, and with great forbearance you govern us; for you have power to act whenever you choose.

Through such works you have taught your people that the righteous must be kind, and you have filled your children with good hope, because you give repentance for sins.

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

Psalm 86: Goodness and Forgiveness

Second Reading: Romans 8: 14 – 16, 24 - 25

A reading from Romans.

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God.

For in hope we are saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

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

Song to Welcome the Gospel: ELW 781 Children of the Heavenly Father

Gospel: Matthew 13: 24 - 30

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

Jesus put before the crowds another parable: “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well.

And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, ‘Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?’ He answered, ‘An enemy has done this.’ The slaves said to him, ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them?’ But he replied, ‘No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.’”

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

Homily: Our first reading today was from the Wisdom of Solomon. We rarely hear readings from this book, because it is from the Apocrypha – a collection of readings that were not accepted into the Bible but are considered to be valuable to the Church and are to be kept and treasured. We have the option to read from them from time to time on Sundays. I usually choose not to read them, but today’s reading will give us an interesting lens to view the Gospel we have just heard.

Luther would have loved the reading we heard this morning from the Wisdom of Solomon, as it reflects his theology very well. It asks a question that makes us think about who we are and about the God we worship. It asks, “Is there any other god who would be concerned that you do not judge others unjustly or harshly, any other god who is so kind and merciful to all.” God cares deeply that we live justly, with mercy and compassion, with grace and mercy for all. God’s forgiveness towards us empowers us to be forgiving to others, to be mild and to be kind in our ways. We are created in the image of God, and so we were created to live in the same way that God chooses to live, and to treat others as God treats us.

As Lutherans we do not often make much of the fact that we were created in the image, nature and personality of God to be God's beloved. In some ways, we are rather obsessed with sin - our own sin and other people's sin – our unworthiness, and probably other people's unworthiness - to the point where we fail to see and celebrate the goodness that is inherently ours as the children of God. There is a nobility and an honour in that, as well as a dignity and a responsibility.

I sometimes cringe when we sing a hymn that thanks God for saving a wretch like me. Granted, there have been days when I have felt fairly wretched and could probably sing that hymn with sincerity, but usually I feel more like a beloved child of God. God did not create us to be wretches...God created us in the image of God and that is what we will always be, even if we are the naughtiest, most ill-mannered, sinful and spoiled kids on the block. We often think that all that God sees and is concerned about when God looks at us is our sinfulness.

Who among us, when we look at our own children, only see their weakness, their flaws, or their failures? Why would our God, who loves us with an unconditional and steadfast love, see us as wretched, hopeless and faithless, even if those were our defining traits? The wisdom of Solomon reminds us God is forgiving, merciful and capable of an everlasting, steadfast love for us...and when God looks at us, God sees at least a bit of what we were created to be in the Garden of Eden.

It is interesting to note that the writer of the Wisdom of Solomon said that the merciful are mild, yet strong. Forgiveness and mercy are signs of strength in Christians. Harshness and a judgmental spirit is a product of fear and self-righteous arrogance and are not admirable traits in Christians...it is also a sign of spiritual immaturity. Wisdom teaches us to leave judgement up to God

and not make decisions about the bounds of God's mercy and grace for others.

Be careful what you label a weed and endeavour to pull out of God's garden, we are told. Your weeding may cause more harm than good, Jesus tells us.

I have weeds growing among the lobelia in my flower garden. If I try to pull them out, the lobelia ends up being uprooted with the weeds. Furthermore, the lobelia seems to be growing very nicely, even using the weeds for support. The weeds had become quite useful and even beneficial. I remember what my son told me: "A weed is just a plant no one has found a use for yet. I always thought he said that to get out of weeding the garden; but he may have been on to something.

My worry is that, if I do not remove the weeds, people will think I am a lousy gardener. As a pastor, it is never my job to weed God's garden...but I am allowed to use Miracle Grow with wild abandon.

There are people who think that the church, like gardens, should be weed free, not realizing that they might just be a weed themselves. The worst sin in Jesus' eyes is self-righteousness ...probably because it is so toxic. The other truth is that we are all a bit weedy, even when we are blooming beautifully in God's garden. You could argue that both St. Peter and St. Paul were weeds in God's garden, yet God made them bloom in the life of the Church, despite their shortcoming and weakness, and even their sin and their failures, which were many.

So we grow where God plants us and often our lives reflect God's glory in ways only God can see. For this we will always be filled with gratitude for such kindness and love. Amen

Hymn: ELW 848 Give to Our God Immortal Praise

Prayers of the Faithful: Tender-hearted God, you care for us all and you never fail to show us your kindness. Your forgiveness and love gives us hope, not just for ourselves, but for all people. Inspire us to be those created in your image: strong, loving and wise. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Your Spirit leads us in faith to call out to you as our Loving Father and conquers our fears. Such hope brings us patience to trust in your goodness and celebrate your promises. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Grant us holy wisdom in this difficult time. Give our leaders discernment so that intelligent decisions can be made for the health and well-being of all your children. 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.**

God of healing, we pray for the ill, for David, recovering from surgery, and for all fearful of illness. Grant us your healing presence and watch over those who care for the sick. 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 the Spirits' presence which is everywhere, in everyone. 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 679 For the Fruit of All Creation

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