

Sunday, June 28, 2020

From Pastor Stephen, Zion Lutheran Church, Pembroke, ON

Welcome:

We greet the presence of Christ in each other, and in welcoming one another we welcome our Lord. We are filled with joy in Christ's presence, for he is our life and our hope.

We sing our **Gathering Hymn:** ELW 733 Great is Thy Faithfulness

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:

Faithful God, your love stands firm from generation to generation, your mercy is always abundant. Give us open and understanding hearts, that having heard your word, we may seek Christ's presence in all whom we meet. **Amen.**

First Reading: Jeremiah 28: 5 - 9

A reading from Jeremiah.

The prophet Jeremiah spoke to the prophet Hananiah in the presence of the priests and all the people who were standing in the house of the Lord; and the prophet Jeremiah said, "Amen! May the Lord do so; may the Lord fulfill the words that you have prophesied, and bring back to this place from Babylon the vessels of the house of the Lord, and all the exiles.

"But listen now to this word that I speak in your hearing and in the hearing of all the people. The prophets who preceded you and me from ancient times prophesied war, famine, and pestilence against many countries and great kingdoms. As for the prophet

who prophesies peace, when the word of that prophet comes true, then it will be known that the Lord has truly sent the prophet.”

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

Hymn: ELW 772 Oh, That The Lord Would Guide My Ways

Second Reading: Romans 6: 12 – 14, 20 - 23

A reading from Romans.

Do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. No longer present your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and present your members to God as instruments of righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. So what advantage did you then get from the things of which you now are ashamed? The end of those things is death. But now that you have been freed from sin and enslaved to God, the advantage you get is sanctification. The end is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

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

Gospel: Matthew 10: 40 - 42

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

Jesus said to the twelve:

“Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. Whoever becomes a

prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous; and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple – truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.”

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

Homily:

Our reading from Saint Matthew's gospel this morning was rather short; but it had much to say, even in its brevity.

The church of Matthew's time lived in a culture and an era when it was not popular to be a Christian. As we heard in last Sunday's Gospel reading, even your family might reject you if you were baptized in Christ and became a follower of the Way. Being warmly welcomed as a Christian was extremely rare back then. You could just as easily expect to be fed to the lions or stoned to death for heresy. Being treated with hospitality and compassion was out of the question. In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus praises those who are kind to his followers...and reminds his followers to be kind to each other.

Jesus points out that how one receives his servants and followers reflects how one feels about him. Indeed, Jesus goes so far as to say that in receiving one of his followers, one receives him. In greeting one who comes in the name of the Lord, we welcome the Lord himself.

We need to think about what this means for our life together. We not only greet each other, we greet the Christ in each other. That has profound implications for how we live together in community

as Christians - for we are to see the image of God, the image of Christ, in all we meet.

If this was John's Gospel we were hearing today, the term little ones would refer to all Christians – no matter what their age or status might be in society. In John's gospel, we hear Jesus use the terms my little children and my little ones as terms of fatherly endearment for all who follow him.

But today's Gospel is the Gospel of Saint Matthew, where the little ones are the insignificant ones who have been pushed to the edges because of their lowly birth, their lack of education, their illness, or simply poverty. Acts of kindness to these little ones will not go unnoticed by God, Jesus tells us.

Welcoming someone in the Gospel of St. Matthew means far more than being hospitable or compassionate. We need to remember that this Gospel was written primarily for Jewish Christians, and in Jewish culture if you eat and drink with others and socialize with them, you are declaring your respect for them.

To welcome someone is to draw them into your life, to include them in your circle of friends. To do this, Jesus reminds us, we are going to have to turn away from all our old boundaries of status, class, race, and age...and see others simply as fellow children of God, who bear the image of God and the very presence of Christ our Lord.

So, offering even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones was to affirm their dignity as people of value in the eyes of God. Jesus encourages us to draw the circle of our friends as large as we possibly can in the Church, casting aside our boundaries, our prejudices and judgmental attitudes.

At the heart of being welcoming followers of Christ is the awareness that we all live by God's grace – that all and everything we have is a gift from God. We may disagree with those we are called to love and care for; but that does not make them any less a child of God than ourselves, or any less worthy of our compassion.

As we draw our circle of care larger, we will find ourselves depending more on what really matters in our life – the gift of God's compassion and tender-hearted grace. Then our warm welcomes will come from hearts that know we were first warmly welcomed by Christ in great compassion and love, and welcoming all will become an act of praise and thanksgiving to God, which will bring joy in heaven and on earth. Amen

Hymn: ELW 870 We Praise You, O God

Prayers of the Faithful:

Gracious God, you have given us all we need. Lead us to share with any who struggle with poverty, without water and food. Bless the work of Canadian Lutheran Relief as it cares for the most vulnerable people in our world. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of justice, banish racism from our hearts and minds. Help us see the presence of our Lord in all we meet, so that we may live in peace with all your children of every race and culture. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of compassion, we pray for all who mourn. We pray for the family and friends of Lois Wolfgram as they say farewell. May she rest in peace in paradise with all of God's saints, in the presence of our Risen Lord. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of wisdom, grant our Church council discernment in these days when difficult decisions need to be made in the life of our parish. Guide our thoughts and lead us through these troubled times. 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 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 848 Come to Our God Immortal Praise

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

PLEASE NOTE:

Next week, we will be taking a break from recording and printing out our Sunday services, so a recording and printed copy will not be posted or delivered next week for Sunday, July 5, 2020. We will however be posting an on-line sermon prepared by one of our ELCIC Bishops or their assistants on our website and Facebook site.